University of Alberta

Reaching In, Reaching Out:
Teachers' Experiences in Outreach School Communities

by

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Abstract

The outreach school, a type of alternative school, often takes the form of non-attendance based schools housed in central locations, designed to serve the needs of students who cannot or will not attend traditional classrooms. This study relates the professional experiences of two participant outreach educators in Alberta and the researcher using a hermeneutically-grounded narrative inquiry methodology. The study explores these teachers' experiences of school in the context of literature about learning communities and about the human landscape of place and space. Several themes are defined including the outreach school as a story with few antecedents; outreach educators as co-architects of the learning community; leadership, advocacy, and ambassadorship roles of outreach teachers; and the ontological shaping of a teaching identity. The author concludes with a line of thinking that suggests that the notions of identity, community, and place are dynamic and evolving, a process which is heightened in schools where the dominant metanarratives are being challenged and rewritten.

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Chapter One

Introducing the Inquiry

The Context of the Research

The last decade of the 20th century saw political and economic changes in Alberta that encouraged restructuring of the public school system. Some of the policy changes, including new funding structures for private schools and new legislation for charter schools, resulted in new ways for individuals to re-imagine their participation in public schooling. While these categories of alternative schooling have not revolutionized the educational landscape, within school districts there has been a shift to find other means of curriculum delivery for those students who are not well served by the typical school setting. One of these innovations has been the outreach school.

In Alberta, outreach schools have seen a huge growth rate, from 46 programs in 1996 to 99 programs by the fall of 2003 (J. Blevins, keynote address, Oct. 2, 2003). By the spring of 2006, 119 outreach schools were registered with Alberta Education (J. Blevins, personal communication, July 9, 2006). In most cases, these programs adopt the form of non-attendance-based junior high or high school credit programs housed in readily accessible resource centers. However, while it is clear that the number of such schools is growing, questions arise about the nature of the educational environment in outreach centers and about how teachers (among others) experience that same environment. By examining the experiences of teachers in outreach centers, this study explores the outreach program as a community of place with the purpose of gaining

insights about how teachers experience community and the pedagogic relationship in non-traditional school settings.

At the onset of a research inquiry, it is useful to begin framing the inquiry with questions that provide direction for the research. These questions may shift over time, as the inquiry proceeds, and with shifts in the contexts of the individuals in the study. For this reason, I have borrowed the metaphor of a puzzle (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which is sometimes used in the articulation of a research topic, to allow for other complexities to surface.

Research Puzzle

How do participant teachers experience the outreach school as a learning community?

This research is guided by the following sub-questions:

What are these teachers' experiences of pedagogical practice in an outreach school?

How are experiences of community reflected in participant teachers' stories?

Definition of Terms

Outreach schools are not a new phenomenon; the literature on this topic has existed for several decades, particularly in the United States, but the definition and structure of outreach schools has varied widely, from travelling science lab to rehabilitation settings for alienated youth. Although outreach schools have seen many incarnations, the term outreach currently refers to schools or separate district programs that attempt to create a more positive learning environment through low teacher-student

ratios; individualized, self-paced, and informal instruction; and non-competitive assessment, extensively utilizing one on one teacher support (Alberta Learning, 2001; Bouska, 2001; Raywid, 1993). Housego (1999, p. 85), citing the ERIC index, defines the term outreach as "community outreach and outreach counseling (that) refers generally to efforts to increase the availability and utilization of services, especially through direct intervention and interaction with the target population." Alberta Learning's Outreach School Handbook (2003) cites this same definition, and adds that the term outreach was preceded in common usage by the term *storefront* and that some outreach schools still have the word storefront as part of their name.

While there is a wealth of literature on learning communities, the literature contains few specific definitions of community itself. Sergiovanni (1994) has provided a conceptualization that acknowledges the importance of the various facets of community. He suggests that when a caring approach to community building is subscribed to, a multi-fold community emerges:

> The bonding of relationship ties help the school become a community by kinship and *a community of place*. The binding of idea ties helps the school become a community of mind. In time, these collective sentiments bring people together as a community of memory and sustain them even when they become separated from each other. (p. 222, italics added)

From Sergiovanni's perspective, we can suppose that a community of place might be seen as an early stage of learning community development. It is the *place* of outreach, as an educational commons, that enables the bonding of relationship ties noted above. For

this reason, this study presupposes that a particular learning community can be investigated as a community of place. In addition to viewing outreach schools as a community of place, it is also important to see them as a *community of practice* in which individuals are engaged in a common endeavour. Packer and Goicoechea (2000, p. 234) note that membership in any community is the start of a struggle for identity, and that we are "always pushing beyond the identity conferred by a community of practice. People actively strive . . . adopting an attitude, taking a stand . . . (and) as they do this their activity acts on that community, reproducing it or transforming it." Communities can be seen as transforming and transformative places.

Significance of the Study

My experience as an outreach educator has led me to believe that the *place* of outreach allows educators and students to form a learning community that supports redefinition of pedagogic roles and relationships. I have explored this learning community through teachers' eyes, and hope that, after engaging the stories of teaching and learning presented in this research, the reader can reconsider the notion of school itself. This is an academic issue of some significance because it questions traditional understandings of the pedagogical relationship as one in which teachers and students are brought together in groups that are characterized by a power differential. It is also a deeply personal question for me as I negotiate my own identity as an educator.

In terms of its potential impact, this study contributes to the literature on learning communities by crafting a series of representations of teacher's experiences in an

outreach school setting. Typically, the literature on learning community focuses primarily on typical school communities, so I would like to extend the breadth of that literature to include outreach schools. I hope I will provoke readers to consider aspects of outreach schooling that could be incorporated into traditional schools in support of environments that enhance community. In this study, I have attempted to create a text that engages the reader in a deep understanding of the experiences of the participants, one in which participants can readily find and recognize themselves, and one in which the reader can see new possibilities for other school settings.

Narrative Inquiry

This research inquiry was undertaken using the framework and methodology of a narrative inquiry. A narrative inquirer understands human experience as inherently storied in a storied world, and situated within the context of place, time, and relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a narrative inquirer, I became part of the inquiry both as a co-participant, and as the teller of my own and others' stories. What follows in this chapter attempts to situate my own experiences within my thinking about this inquiry, presented in the form of personal exposition assisted by memory pieces in various forms. In this way, I intend to reveal myself by attending to my own perceptions of place and relationships over time in my teaching experience.

Engaging My Own Stories of School

In the classroom, a fertile meeting ground for educators and students exists in the common experience of the curriculum as a lived practice (Aoki, 1993). For the first decade of my teaching practice, the shared terrain for my students and me was the drama and English language arts curricula and the way we explored a piece of literature or reacted to a drama activity. When I see former students, they reminisce about the camaraderie that resulted from sharing our poetry and humorous moments in drama rehearsal. Often, students reveal much of themselves to their teachers and each other through the medium of curriculum, and as a result caring relationships are seeded and grow.

Remembrance: Grade 7, 1981

I can still recall my Grade 7 classroom, with its round tables—five students to a table—and Mrs. Kittlitz's desk by the blackboard. Mrs. Kittlitz was an elderly teacher of the grand dame tradition: she would not dignify shabby behaviour with anger or even a rebuke, but would wait quietly for our self-consciousness to work upon our conscience. It was she who read aloud to us the classic tale of The Little Prince, and held serious discussions with us about things that were "matters of consequence" for 12-year-olds. Somehow, Mrs. Kittlitz made it all right to sit with Lisa Massie, a strange little girl in our grade. Somehow, she made it comfortable to work in groups with boys. When one of the girls got her first menstrual period rather publicly in gym class, Mrs. K helped us all, even the boys, understand how to acknowledge to her that it was the most natural thing in the world. That year I felt I was friends with everyone in my class. I loved school and loved Mrs. Kittlitz. When in the ensuing years I had dispassionate or disinterested teachers, I appreciated her even more.

When I look back at my own favourite childhood years of public schooling in junior high school, I realize that the sense of belonging in those homeroom classrooms was a real yet intangible thing, something that guided the relationships within. I felt that I

and others had a place. I remember feeling that we cared for each other, even those we didn't particularly chum with. Somehow, it seemed those teachers cultivated a sense of *us-ness* that made us look out for each other through the maze of junior high school. I am sure it is no coincidence that I thrived in those years. I believe this experience played a role in my choice of career and my predilection for working with adolescents.

In the last few years of my teaching practice, the sense of community in classroom has increasingly intrigued me. In my placement in a junior high school, I noted a steady increase in students who left midyear to enrol in the outreach program. Like my colleagues, I wondered how an independent learning protocol could support the pedagogical relationship that I believed was central to student learning.

My sense of typical classrooms are of busy, happy places where engagement is high and discovery always just around the corner, where many hands make light work, and 30 heads are far better than one. For me, the word learning has always implied a cooperative endeavour. But in outreach schools how do students and their teachers move beyond a superficial relationship without the shared space that the classroom place provides? How do teachers and students share in a sense of community when students are not compelled to attend at a place called school? It was only when I accepted a placement at the outreach school in our district that these questions took on a pedagogic immediacy.

The first sense that I was in a different world had a lot to do with the place of outreach, the in-classroom and out-of-classroom places that Connelly and Clandinin (1999) recognize as being part of the professional identity landscape. Like their research

participant, I found myself "on a landscape almost unrecognizable as a teacher's landscape" (p. 123), but I could see the pedagogical possibilities of the place.

Remembrance: Coming to Storefront School

It was the place of the outreach centre that made me decide to go there. I know this about myself: I am very sensitive to place, the aesthetic of it, the light, the symbolism of décor, the layout, the sheer vibration of it. Schools are interesting places that way. In my work as a workshop facilitator, I visit a great many schools. Each school feels a certain way, an impression you register on a barely perceptible level within a few minutes of entering the building and often before meeting any of the inhabitants.

I had been to Storefront School once before a few years previous and had been interested by the shape and feel of the place, so when a position came open as one of the possibilities for a new teaching placement, I decided to visit the school. When I walked in the door, I was immediately struck by how little it seemed like a school. The front entrance was a large arch painted a matte eggplant colour and draped with hanging plants. The foyer featured an alcove with a small bench, framed by a mural of a window opening out onto the ocean. More murals, of stone walls, ivy, Grecian columns, and sunflowers were featured on perimeter walls.

Large skylights cast natural light around an expansive central room, where teacher workstations and student desks were clustered together, and these appeared new and clean, with comfortably padded and adjustable chairs for teachers and students alike. Around this central room, there were smaller rooms for conferencing and seminars, and these featured banks of south facing windows. I noticed a stained glass window, large tropical plants placed together to serve as room dividers, and a fish tank full of brightly coloured fish. Throughout the open area, teachers and students were engaged in seated conversation, and there was a low hum of activity coming from one of the back rooms. I was captivated. I was led into a staffroom where comfortable wingchairs circled a central table, and offered a hot drink while I waited for the principal. As I sipped I wondered, what possibilities could there be for education in a place that was so inviting, so nurturing? (personal journal excerpt)

Lugones (1987) suggests that to be said to truly exist, a world has to be inhabited by people, real and imaginary. This can be a dominant society or an idiosyncratic world within a larger society. My in-class teaching world was inhabited primarily by teenagers and characterized by social patterns that suggested a series of vertical and hierarchical

power relationships. Some of these patterns were comfortable for me through sheer familiarity; some felt binding. By comparison, the new world that I entered upon my induction to the outreach school was inhabited on a daily basis by students that were both older and younger adults, with teachers, students, teacher aides, administrators, and administrative support staff all contributing without a noticeably disparate power base. I felt this in sharp contrast to my previous understanding of schools. As Lugones poignantly states, "Some worlds are bigger than others" (p. 10). The outreach school felt like a tiny world within the monolithic educational world and its established metanarratives.

Becoming a World Traveler

Lugones (1987) has used the terms world-traveling and world-traveler to try to recount her experiences of being an outsider within a mainstream society, offering a description of shared experiences within non-dominant realities. She suggests that those who are "outside the mainstream . . . construction or organization of life" are "world-travelers as a matter of necessity and survival" (1987, p. 11). I became a world-traveler, as Lugones uses the term, both to survive the new opportunities in my teaching assignment, and due to a personal philosophy that seeks diverse experiences. On one hand, I had taught in the typical classroom for 11 years, and continued to offer professional development to teachers living in that reality. On the other hand, I was trying to learn what it was like to be an effective teacher without the trappings of the teacher:

classrooms, lesson plans, group instruction, and time/space parameters. It was not a smooth transition.

Remembrance: First Semester at Storefront School

I hate this. I don't know why I thought I would like it here. The things that make me a good teacher are of absolutely no use here: interesting lessons, organizing group activities, using humour to get kids past a sticky situation—none of that is really valuable. I feel like my entire teacher training and years of experience are useless. The most practical training I have had for this job is waitressing. Fifty million things to do in an ever shifting list of priorities, all service delivered with a smile. The only thing I do that remotely resembles how I used to teach is when I am marking, but since there is an endless flow of marking, there is little time to do a proper job of providing feedback. I am not sure how useful the feedback is anyway, considering that it comes at the very end of an entire unit of work. I am going to have to change this for next semester, because I am hardly any use to my students, they aren't getting the benefit of my help nearly as much as they should. I suppose it doesn't matter, since I feel like I hardly know them, and from the little time they spend here, maybe they like it that way. (personal journal excerpt)

I echo Lugones' statement (1987) that those who have the distinct experience of being world-travelers also have the experience of remembering the other worlds and ourselves in them, and sometimes a kind of homesickness occurs against which you are helpless. It passes, and with it comes a reconstruction of the self within that world, an ability to recognize oneself as an agent, perhaps an integrated agent that can start to inhabit a plurality of places without being a caricature of oneself in either place. Toward the end of my first year in an outreach placement, the angst of adaptation had eased enough for me to get down to the business of settling in.

Remembrance: A Day in the Life of an Outreach Teacher, Second Year - November

My morning starts rather typically. I head in the back door and go directly to my computer on the teaching floor. I know I am a little early and can hear the rest of the staff getting coffee and informally debriefing in the hallway, but this is the best time for me to deal with email and voice mail. I start to make a list of students who have left messages that they need phone or email tutorial and respond to the quick questions. Too soon, it is 9:30 a.m.

I teach all of the English in this Grade 7 through 12 outreach school, as well as Grade 10 Social Studies, Learning Strategies, Career and Life Management, and a few career and technology studies courses. I currently have students registered in 14 different courses. I think one of the most challenging aspects of tutoring my students is working with the material itself. As a regular classroom teacher, I know what I meant and what I was looking for when I designed a particular learning activity. Even after a year and a half, I am still learning the commercially compiled course material, and I frequently find myself disoriented when asked to help with a question, often having to read over the entire section and skim the lessons to get a sense of the objective before responding to student inquiry. A couple more times through each course and I will know the material much better.

More challenging yet is reading all of the literature. Each of the core courses has its own set of literature, and although I attempted to systematically read each of the anthologies, plays, and novels, by the time I was partway through I have to admit I gave up. I couldn't remember all the pieces anyways. I have become a master at questioning a student in a provocative manner to lead them toward their own interpretation of a piece, rather than actually guiding them toward some poorly thought out notion of my own. This has its advantages of course, but it does leave me feeling rather out on a limb. Occasionally, I have to tell a student that I will get back to them in an hour after I have read the piece. The experience of being responsible for a student's education without having consistent mastery over the material is one the most disconcerting aspects of my job, exacerbated by the fact that as an English Language Arts teacher, it has been my typical modus operandi to design my own units, relying only peripherally on published textbooks.

I complete my initial response to student inquiries and then set about assessing the list of things to do. I have a film studies seminar tomorrow for the Grade 9s, and need to create and copy a handout that will assist them with the assignment. In this way, the seminar doubles as a differentiated learning strategy that can replace part of the module assignment. Some seminars are just participation for extra credit, and students attend those most willingly. They are time consuming to create and anything I can do to reduce my students' writing and therefore my marking is likely a good strategy all around at this point.

Each English Language Arts module takes an hour to mark, 45 minutes if I skim longer pieces a bit and keep my comments to a minimum. Engaging in real dialogue with my students on their papers becomes a real luxury at certain times when the marking

piles up. I currently have approximately 120 active students in 14 courses; they each submit seven units of study and at least two exams. In the last 10 days, I have received 42 modules, but because we had parent teacher interviews for much of last week, little was marked. I select five modules from the pile as a small goal for the day. It isn't much, but a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

I know I won't complete these five even before I start, but it is good to have goals. Before 10:30, I have tutored four drop-in students, and counselled a near-hysterical mom whose daughter is hitting bottom after a difficult summer relationship and an ensuing pregnancy. Needless to say, this young girl is having a hard time focusing on her course work. As Grade 10 co-ordinator, I serve the combined role of den mother and resource person for these kids and their families. By the end of the phone call, I have the mother convinced that her daughter's request to engage in family counselling has some merit, and have sent her some names to contact. I stop everything to document all the morning's interpersonal activity in our anecdotal database, so that other staff members who work with these students will know they have been in. I go to the staff room to check in on the informal staff meeting that occurs daily mid-morning in the time called coffee break. This is our best time to catch up on student information, who has moved, left, re-surfaced from being inactive, re-enrolled, gotten kicked out of the house, has won in their rodeo division, has gotten another modeling contract. Could we get together material to last for the month that she will be gone to Europe please?

By noon, I have completed the preparation of the seminar materials and phoned the Grade 9 students to remind them to sign up for the offering. Although it was slow going last year during implementation of the seminar program, this year's students attend seminars in droves, forcing me to cap attendance due to space restrictions. This is interesting when you realize that we are a program of choice and that these students tend to be kids who thought that they would prefer not to attend school. One of my best moments this last month was when, at the end of a cross-graded seminar on the short story, a student remarked while leaving the room that the seminar had made her want to go back to school. The seminars are labour intensive, with the cross-grade ones requiring extra planning and thought. Planning a 3-hour class is a challenge, but many students come from surrounding rural areas, and transportation is too difficult to arrange to have them come in for just an hour and then have them sit in study hall for the rest of the day until they have another ride. It is best for me to work with them while they are here, because I may not see much of some of them except for these seminars.

During lunch I find out that a Grade 11 student who I was counselling last week has run away. I am unusually upset by this, for this student was in my Grade 8 homeroom several years ago when I worked at the local junior high, and was a former neighbour as well. He feels his family situation is intolerable and he may well be right. I hope he finds his way back here, and I locate some contact numbers for community and social services in case he stops in at the school. Often, kids will only come for help in the extremity of their circumstances, and this is when they are most accepting of help, but that window is often open only briefly before they are sucked back into the street scene.

In the afternoon, a troupe of my English 20-1 students come in to work together, and soon I am drawn into their work circle, interspersing a group tutorial on writing the critical literary essay with getting updated on which piece Cassandra has chosen to perform at recital this weekend. We listen to an incredibly challenging Prokiviev piece. I must be suitably impressed before we can return to the essay at hand, but after listening to the piece I am wondering which is more important in this moment, the essay or Cassandra's musical endeavours.

When I come back from supper break, this crew is just packing up. I notice the forlorn and unmarked modules still sitting on the corner of my desk. I check the clock; I have 3 hours and only two tutorials booked. Perhaps I will get to a few of these tonight. I know I should take them home, but after being at the school on one of the 12-hour days, I just can't mark. Perhaps tomorrow night I will. (personal journal entry)

Comparing my personal writing over the first 2 years, I can see that during my second year in the outreach school, I became much more at ease with my new teaching practice. I had found a way to re-story myself as an educator that fit comfortably. Lugones (1987) describes a series of experiences that lead to one becoming *at-ease* in a world: becoming *humanly bonded* and a *fluent speaker*, developing a *shared history* and being *normatively happy*. I became at ease first through being humanly bonded, and it is a tribute to the staff, students, and other community members there that they are able to reach out to newcomers in this way. It was through this bonding that I became a fluent speaker; to use language in a way that embodied both the beliefs I held and the practices of the place. This world also used different language. I am reminded of Chamoiseau's (1994/7) recollections of different languages being inside and outside of the self, and certainly that is true. With a change of school setting, I experienced a shift from the typical school language and a story of expectations, to a language of hope and possibility. There are now stories of me within that language and in the narrative of this outreach community.

With time, I have become at ease because a shared history has sprung up, and a part of this history has to do with our collective identity, shaped by "being on the margins" and "at risk" within the world of education (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 125). I have been able to say, as Lugones (1987, p. 11) says, that "this is *me* in *that* world." Lugones (p. 12) identifies these experiences as part of "being *at-ease* in a 'world,' but I confess to not having experienced her version of a "maximal way of being at ease:" in my time in the outreach school setting I was never entirely normatively happy. I continued to question ways of being in the outreach world until my departure 3 years after my initiation.

There is discomfort, a heightened awareness when world-traveling, and a lens that allows you to see yourself in both worlds, and therefore see both worlds with the eyes of the *other* self. You become a *plurality of selves* (Lugones, 1987) and you can start to deconstruct just what it is that makes each world, by distilling some of who you are in that place. The question then isn't "who am I?" but "who am I *there*?" leading to a sense of wonder, an openness to surprise, and a playfulness. It is newly open to self-construction, to understanding what it is to be a person in that world, and what it is to be our self in others' eyes (Lugones, pp. 16–17). It is this openness that allows one to see freshly both *at home* and *away* that perhaps changes the perception of each.

There are worlds *within,* just as there are worlds *without,* and it is a function of perspective to notice how positioning one in the outer world can change the inner world. I have become adept at swinging in arc-like fashion, between the centers of each of the worlds and in the boundaries between the two. I am reminded of Chamoiseau's

discussion of language: "The articulation changed. The rhythm changed. The intonation changed. Words that were more or less familiar began to sound different" (1994/7, p. 47). In the outreach school, I found myself in a new language, and this required me to seek for, and find the other, within myself.

Like Chamoiseau (1994/7), I often wished to go home, to a "place unscathed in a world turned upside-down" to see if "the house can recover its former magic" (pp. 49, 50). Even though I was by now quite comfortable at the outreach school, at the end of my third year at Storefront School, I decided to accept an English position at the local high school. It was with mixed feelings that I made preparations to leave Storefront School.

Overview of the Inquiry

At the onset of this research inquiry, I wondered about how other outreach educators experienced their teaching lives. I approached this inquiry using the metaphor of a research puzzle in a primary question with subsequent sub-questions stated this way:

- How do participant teachers experience the outreach school as a learning community?
- What are these teachers' experiences of pedagogical practice in an outreach school?
- How are experiences of community reflected in participant teachers' stories?

Shortly after entering into the field, I became aware of questions unanticipated which were surfacing and needed attending to. I add two of these questions that preoccupied me during later stages of the research.

- How do participant teachers imagine themselves within the outreach community?
- How do participant teachers see themselves and others creating and re-creating a learning community in the outreach school?

This narrative inquiry was conducted with two other teachers from two outreach schools. Information was collected through a series of site visits and conversations, as well as examination of a small number of artefacts, and supported through shared field notes. The initial immersion in the field occurred over a period of 10 weeks, after which time site visits and conversations reduced in frequency. Through these interactions, I gained a clearer understanding of the lives of teachers and their perceptions of community of the outreach school.

Using Literature to Understand the Inquiry

Throughout this inquiry I have read and re-read scholarly works to define and redefine my understanding of learning communities toward the purpose of positioning my own thinking. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 136) note "Whatever our sense of the bordered discourse, as narrative inquirers we need to be mindful of how we position our work." I started by reading texts that focused on learning communities as a possibility within a discourse of school reform and re-imagining.

Within this discourse, I noticed that literature on caring and the nature of pedagogical relationships was consistently embedded in the idea of learning community, and so I explored literature about teaching from an ethic of caring. Positioned alongside

the research about learning communities was writing about professional learning communities; to another side were studies that examined the effects of size or alternate organizational structures on learning communities. Another aspect that I explored looked at the tension between community and individual identity. Because my own experience suggested that the place of the outreach school was an important aspect of the community, I engaged work from cultural geography, and this last brought me a new sense of how an awareness of place and space can contribute to a learning community. Within the following chapter, I will review a sampling of these bordered discourses, and will also explore the spaces where they overlap and return to each other.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The proliferation of literature regarding learning communities is evidence of great interest in the topic within the educational community. Research on learning communities generally tends to reflect the lived realities of teachers in typical classrooms. However, the essence of community and the philosophical stance within this discourse are relevant to the outreach school setting as well. Manning and Saddlemire (1996) define community as follows.

> A secondary school community or sense of community may be defined as a continuing evolving process whereby learners and educators interact and work collaboratively in an atmosphere of trust, belongingness, and respect toward shared common interests and commitment to common educational goals (p. 42)

In this chapter, I survey literature that engages the discourse of learning community, and examine some assumptions within this literature. In the first section, I explore the characteristics of learning communities. Subsequently, I examine main themes that appear in the literature: the role of an ethic of caring in pedagogical relationships, leadership, and a new vision for a community of practice. In the last section, I question some assumptions and tensions underlying the arguments for pursuing learning community within schools. While there is a large body of literature concerning various aspects of *community in schools* (for example based on multicultural conditions) these are extraneous to this literature review, which is limited to the work that advocates a rethinking of the purposes and structures of public schooling.

Communities or Organizations?

The phrase *learning community* has a degree of connotation in the literature; it is sometimes used correspondingly with other terms like *learning organization* and *caring community*, depending on the ideological orientation of the author. The phrase learning organization has been used as a way of acknowledging the school system, which by nature is partly engineered and partly organic (Sergiovanni, 1999). But other authors (Cocklin, 1999; Johnson, 1999) believe that use of this term creates a paradox because it has been adopted by writers from the business context. Learning organization is a term that has been used extensively in literature that deals primarily with adult learners in formal structures (Dufour, 1996, 1997; Fullan, 1995; Senge, 1992), or in work that comes from an organizational theory background. Organization theory is results-oriented and concerned with continuous improvement and measurable success (Dufour, 1996; Sergiovanni, 1994). The differences in using the metaphor of an organization or a community are subtle but powerful. In more recent writing, writers who once referred to learning organizations now refer to professional learning communities (see Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005a). For these writers, the language has changed but the thinking is still expressed in language that suggests its roots lie in systems theory.

The term caring community or caring learning community is embraced by those writers who advocate an ethic of caring as a desirable shift in pedagogic philosophy (Noddings, 1988). These writers promote the idea that a caring pedagogical relationship is central to learning and community. However, most learning community theorists tend

to recognize caring as an integral part of community development, and so the terms learning community, caring community, and caring learning community are often used interchangeably. Generally, education writers tend to prefer some variation on the phrase learning community because the word community connotes the institutions of civil society and denotes an emphasis on personal connections (Sergiovanni, 1999). The term and associated ideals stand opposed to the economic rationalism that has developed in the public schooling system (Cocklin, 1999; Coombe, 1999; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Wells, 1999). Sergiovanni (1994) directly confronts this concern with the terms organization and community by reminding us that organizations are formal, characterized by schematic arrangements, often linear, and often hierarchical, designed to enhance effectiveness. They are initially about people, but tend over time to become separated from people. Sergiovanni contrasts this with the word community, which connotes relationships that are based on an intrinsic collegiality, common purposes and values, and felt interdependencies. He suggests that changing the word changes the metaphor and in time alters the realities. The notion of a community of learners is not new, but is in fact an idea embedded in the philosophy of Dewey (Coombe, 1999). What is new is how the concept has evolved, and the variety of definitions that have emerged (Coombe, 1999; Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999; Merz & Furman, 1997).

Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft

Several writers (Merz & Furman, 1997; Noddings, 1996; Orr, 1995; Raywid, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1999) have begun to use 19th century sociologist Tonnies' ideas of

gesellschaft and *gemeinschaft* to depict a continuum of societal relationships. These two German words are loosely translated to mean *society* and *community* respectively, but they were coined for this purpose in the 19th century, during a shift from an agricultural society to an industrial one, so the original translations are no longer entirely adequate. Nor should the terms be seen to correspond with size or type of local community, for example the village and the city. Merz and Furman (1997, p. 12) quoting Tonnies, assert that "all intimate private and exclusive living together is understood as life in gemeinschaft . . . one goes into gesellschaft as one goes into a strange country."

In a *gesellschaft*, social contracts define human interactions. This type of grouping is characterized by self-interest and depicts relationships as conditional. Relationships are voluntary and functionally specific, (Merz & Furman, 1997) and based on trade, involving incentives for compliance in a rule-based arena. Individual will is necessarily constrained because of human self-interest, which can be shaped into right behaviour with a system of rewards and punishment (Sergiovanni, 1999). However, there are many more opportunities to exercise rational will because of the ever-widening circle of choice. Relationships are not usually based on feelings of kinship (Raywid, 1993). This is a society governed by rules and laws. *Gesellschaft* is a term that presumes a level of role identification based on superficial relationships (Raywid, 1993). For example, in a *gesellschaft* one would know another as the butcher or the veterinarian, and the relationships would primarily be characterized by that one kind of interaction.

Conversely, a *gemeinschaftlich (lich=adjective form)* relationship is based on social covenants born of social and moral obligations. These are relationships that are

one's birthright through "natural will" (Merz & Furman, 1997). Relationships are characterized by reciprocity, loyalty, and a sense of identity. These relationships are intimate and have immeasurable influence on the soul (Orr, 1995). Rather than rule-based, interactions are norm-based. Will is viewed as something to be unconstrained; humans are perceived as having the capacity for altruism and the need for freedom to develop it (Sergiovanni, 1999). In a *gemeinschaft*, relationships are of a multi-faceted nature. The person who butchers your meat is also your neighbour and a member of your church; your children call him *uncle* when he comes for Sunday dinner. One's relationship with this person would be more individually-based and less role-based. Thus, the sense of interdependence and obligation is far greater. The family is suggested as the epitome of a *gemeinschaft* relationship (Merz & Furman, 1997; Orr; Sergiovanni, 1999). Tonnies asserted that one kind of *gemeinschaft* was based in kinship. Reflecting the realities of the agricultural society of the time, he also advanced the idea that *gemeinschaft* often depended on a community of place, or a common habitat, such as the village. However, a *gemeinschaft* of the mind was also possible, represented through spiritual affiliation (Orr; Sergiovanni, 1994). Most institutions, including schools, have more closely resembled *gesellschaft* than *gemeinschaft* as of late (Noddings, 1996).

As Merz and Furman (1997) explain, historically, the village school was an extension of the home, church, and commerce of a community. Over time, the function of the school evolved to serve as a bridge between the local and wider communities. Through shifting societal and educational trends, the local community, that once supported this *bridge* function as a necessary supplement to enhance participation at

wider levels beyond the local, has found the school separated from the community to a great extent. The terms *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft* are sometimes used in the literature to illustrate the qualities sought by proponents of the learning community, the general argument being that as society becomes increasingly characterized by *gesellschaftlich* relationships, so our schools also mirror that reality. In the face of this movement, these scholars call for a better balance, toward a more *gemeinschaftlich* ethos (Merz & Furman; Orr, 1995; Raywid, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1999; Stazenski, 1995).

Describing Learning Communities

Learning community is distinct from the generic term school community as a term that encompasses a series of characteristics and assumptions. Across the literature, writers have attributed a variety of characteristics to the learning community. It is seen as a focus that allows teachers to make priority decisions in the workplace (Johnson, 1999); a place where all members focus on learning, questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions (Cocklin, 1999); and a relational process which helps create bonds to a shared set of values and ideas (Sergiovanni, 1999). Learning communities are said to rely on webs of meaning (Deal & Peterson, 1999) and webs of reciprocal moral obligation (Sergiovanni, 1999) to strengthen an integral sense of interdependence (Wells, 1999). Learning communities are seen as places where an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1988) and constructivist pedagogy (Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999) is supported by the structure of community (Merz & Furman, 1997).

One of the characteristics of the learning community philosophy is in the re-imagining of the teacher's role. The teacher is seen as an active learner in situations with students, developing a shared atmosphere of intellectual inquiry characterized by support, caring, and mutual respect. Many writers point out that this change in schools would be manageable without the need for a grand restructuring of schools, but would require a subtle shift in the mindset of educators (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Lipsitz, 1995; Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Noddings, 1988). However, it is noted that the stamina of the educational institution to withstand reform may require a more revolutionary shift in order to create a lasting change and not just a transient adaptation of older methods and ideologies (Merz & Furman, 1997; Noddings, 1988).

Caring Learning Communities

In the learning community philosophy, there is an emphasis on the teacher's responsibility to engage in and model caring, altruistic, *gemeinschaftlich* relationships, to see learners as central to all considerations, to hold a constructivist view of learning and to redefine the teacher's role from one of centrality to that of co-participant in learning. In the establishment of a learning community, it is the educator's role to foster an atmosphere of caring and nurturing, risk-taking and celebration (Johnson, 1999; Larrivee, 2000; Lipsitz, 1995; Wells, 1999).

The ethic of caring is a theme that appears virtually without exception in the literature about learning communities. This notion was popularized in the last two decades with the work of prominent writers like Nel Noddings. An ethic of caring asks

educators to embrace the development of a caring ethic in relation with students as central to their development as citizens and moral agents, and as a pedagogical stance imperative to risk-taking in learning. Caring establishes an effective culture for learning (Larrivee, 2000; Lipsitz, 1995; Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Noddings, 1988) and is demonstrable, active, and proactive, and characterized by respect, authenticity, thoughtfulness, and emotional integrity (Larrivee). School research shows there are many strategies used by teachers to infuse the classroom with an ethic of caring. These range from creating one-on-one time with students and using appropriate self-disclosure to create rapport (Deiro, 1997), to using storytelling to celebrate actions of caring and traditional rituals to celebrate relationships and key caring acts (Staszenski, 1995). By embodying the ethic of caring in storytelling and rituals, members articulate and emphasize the communities' valuation of them (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Noblit & Rogers). Other caring behaviours are showing respect, encouraging students, modelling tolerance, trusting students and challenging students (Bulach, Brown, & Potter, 1998). Teachers who genuinely care for their students can demonstrate this by crafting rich pedagogical experiences and attending to creating opportunities for students to succeed in evaluated tasks (Ennis & McCauley, 2002; Dempsey, 1994). The literature about caring in the pedagogical relationship coincides with literature on learning community. Manning and Saddlemire (1996) point out that "in several aspects, positive school environments and a sense of community are synonymous" (p. 47). Caring learning communities are often discussed in terms of the metaphor of family, which aptly echoes the fundamental

essence of the gemeinschaft relationship (Cocklin, 1999; Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999; Merz & Furman, 1997; Raywid, 1993)

The creation of caring learning communities promotes virtues valued by the community at large and allows us to create a schooling structure that can respond to some of the social factors that impair student learning (Larrivee, 2000; Merz & Furman, 1997; Noddings, 1988). Aside from its value in modelling moral behaviours, many writers support the notion that caring, in a deeply individualistic manner with total regard for the child, is essential as a pedagogical approach (Deiro, 1997; Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1999; Staszenski, 1995). Literature about caring learning communities often presupposes a learning structure that is based less on teacher transmission and is more constructivist in its assumptions. Caring creates an environment that promotes the risk-taking disposition central to constructivist learning (Bulach, Brown, & Potter, 1998; Lipsitz, 1995), enhances students' sense of belonging (Larrivee; Lipsitz, 1995), and is occasionally linked to measurable improvements in students' learning and achievement. The last point needs to be further addressed though. There is some citation of research between caring and academic achievement (Bulach, Brown, & Potter; Raywid, 1993) but this is generally absent as writers stop short of linking the development of the caring learning community with student achievement. The development of a learning community is generally seen as a way of combating the economic rationalism that has increasingly appeared in the purposes and structures of schooling, so it may be counterproductive to make claims about increased student achievement.

Several writers make suggestions about how to situate the development of caring in learning communities, arguing that the relational aspects of teaching should not replace the instrumental, but complement it as an equally important consideration. Variously, this is represented as the idea that caring does not replace learning, but creates an effective culture for learning (Lipsitz, 1995), and that to value caring does not deny the instrumental aspects of teaching but seeks to create a balance between the two (Noblit & Rogers, 1995). Raywid (1993) provides research that shows the nature of personal relationships to be the most distinctive feature of school in the perceptions of many alternative school teachers.

Professional Learning Communities

Another identifiable trend in the literature is the specific focus that understands teachers as professional learners and holds that development of educators' learning communities is imperative in a thriving learning community. The teacher is seen as an exemplar learner in a community of practice (Sergiovanni, 1999). In a learning community, professional development must be reconceived to be an ongoing series of actions and attitudes embedded in practice within the school. Professional development is sometimes envisioned as a whole staff activity based on the needs of the school, and a starting point for school reform towards the creation of a learning community (Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999; Lezotte, 2005), or variously conceived as small group collaboration (Schmoker, 2005) or a systemic process of reform (Fullan, 1995, 2005; O'Neil, 1995). Establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) is viewed as a

way to address many concerns currently encountered in schools (Dufour, 1997). They are seen as a possible avenue to promoting greater self-reflection among teachers and establishing collegiality. This is especially effective if learning teams are structured to contain cross-faculty members, a practice that moves teachers away from being subject or grade specialists and helps to promote whole school dialogue (Hindle & Sedo, 2000; Larrivee, 2000). Professional learning communities can be an excellent exemplar, for students and communities, of an attitude of lifelong learning, one possible benchmark of achievement (Barth, 2005). Another benefit to increased faculty dialogue is the opportunity to address educational vocabulary. Often, educators use a great deal of specialized language, but the meanings underlying these terms are often inconsistent. Professional dialogue among staff is essential to negotiate the meaning of pedagogical terms and ideas (Coombe, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Wells, 1999). This will create a learning-enriched culture and forge the collaborative bonds that make learning community restructuring possible. Creating professional learning communities will effect changes in professional practice toward a greater focus on learning in the classroom, rather than teaching (Dufour, 2002; Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005b). Dufour, Eaker, and Dufour (2005b) citing Schmoker assert that professional participation in learning communities is "the best-known means by which we might achieve truly historic, wide-scale improvements in teaching and learning" (p. 7).

Some writers note the prevalence of an ethos of individualism and autonomy present in teachers (Merz & Furman, 1997; Sugrue, 1999), and recognize that school structures do not easily accommodate more community-oriented professional

development (Everhart, 1993; Jenlick & Kinnucan-Welsch, 1999; Noddings, 1988). A history of competitiveness and isolation among teachers remains part of the dominant narrative of educators (Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour, 2005b; Sugrue, 1999), and is perpetuated by state attempts to compare school effectiveness through standardized testing.

Leadership in the Learning Community

While there is a general consensus that the reconceptualization that would transform schools into communities of learners rests on the shoulders of educators, there is some divisiveness about whether teachers or official school leaders are better positioned to enact these changes. School leaders have traditionally been responsible for steering the direction and philosophy of schools through such activities as mission statement building. However, as reform trends come and go and as teachers experience intensification of expectation in the workplace (Johnson, 1999), the tendency on the part of teachers has increasingly been to grin and nod before returning to their classrooms in disinterested resignation and closing the doors behind them (Dufour, 1996; Sugrue, 1999).

Often, literature about learning communities emphasizes teachers' presence and direct work with children as the primary factors in developing learning communities (Deiro, 1997; Manning & Saddlemire, 1996; Noblit & Rogers, 1995). However, often teachers assume positions of leadership in the school, either formally or informally. Deal and Peterson (1999) suggest that in order for a school to develop into a community, it

must embrace and articulate values and beliefs. One of the roles of a school leader is to embody these values through a variety of actions. Storytelling, collegial sharing, organizing formal recognition ceremonies, and advocacy are acts that can symbolically articulate the beliefs of the community (Staszenski, 1995). How a leader engages in everyday tasks and relationships with others becomes an expression of shared vision. Sergiovanni (1999) indicates that in a caring learning community, leaders need to redefine their sources of authority by tapping the felt moral obligations of teachers. They need to position themselves within the norms that constitute cultural order even as they attempt to change it, in order to create a kind of consensual understanding between members, who "converse together, learn together and enquire together as they care together to construct a reality that helps them to navigate through a complex world" (Sergiovanni, p. 20). He asserts that the first roles of principals are ministerial ones, and that "it is in the principal's role responsibilities that we find the heart of school leadership—a commitment to administer to the needs of the school as an institution by serving its purpose (and) by serving those who struggle to embody those purposes" (p. 20). In this sense, the leadership of a community is seen as exemplar of communitarian ethics and norms.

Hindle and Sedo (2000), in their work outlining the change process in their own school, articulate activities that show leadership functioning in a wide variety of capacities. Among these are the capacities of facilitating the re-visioning of the school direction, initiating team building activities among staff to increase collegiality, enhancing group identity and interdependence among staff, and establishing methods for

nurturing a relationship between the school and the greater community. This last point is echoed in other research and writings (Cocklin, 1999; Deal & Peterson, 1999).

School leaders have the obligation to extend the learning community beyond the school (Raywid, 1993), and one way to do that is to extend the classroom out into the community. Parents and others, such as business community members, can be valuable members in the community of learners. For example, Everhart (1993) documents a learning community that made extensive use of shops, museums, and art galleries as part of the curriculum. The importance of adopting an ethic of inclusion toward those with vested interest is well documented (Cocklin, 1999; Coombe, 1999; Hindle & Sedo, 2000). Leaders employ a sort of public language that allows them to fulfill their role as liaison with the greater community. School leaders must be fluent in communication with a wide variety of persons in a wider variety of contexts. They also must be aware of the history of community within the school and beyond (Deal & Peterson, 1999). History and tradition are very influential in the successful establishment of learning communities. If there is a history of interdependence (Cocklin, 1999), or a history of competition and individualism (Sugrue, 1999) this will affect how readily a learning community can evolve and sustain itself.

Autonomy and Community

Descriptions of the potential for learning communities are such that they can induce in the reader a state of nostalgia (Coombe, 1999; Everhart, 1993). In the current era, many of our transactions with other humans have shifted to be more *gesellschaftlich*,

and we long for a simpler place and age characterized by the greater relevance of *gemeinschaftlich* relationships. Learning community theory, with its emphasis on collaboration, caring, and community seems to be a therapeutic strategy for an educational system that is increasingly responsive to shifts in greater society. However, there is a significant underlying tension in this literature that is addressed only rarely and then superficially by most writers. This is the paradox between community and individual autonomy.

Our society is shaped around the socio-political philosophy of liberal democracy. Liberalism is characterized by a reverence for individualism, autonomy, and self-determination (Everhart, 1993; Noddings, 1996). Orr (1995) indicates that "liberalism is rooted in a struggle for the primacy of individual rights and freedoms over collective rights" (p. 29) and that private self-interest is the guiding force behind participation in political institutions, rather than interest in the common good. Orr also suggests that autonomy is central to North American liberal society.

The concept of autonomy is germane to this discussion because it is a seminal feature of present society, and any attempt to define, initiate, and build schools as communities will be affected by the manner in which the dominant societal discourse views community (Everhart, 1993). Education, a public and socially reproductive institution, has traditionally attempted to reflect the face of autonomy as a way of preparing youth to be functioning citizens within a liberal democracy (Callan, 1997; Everhart). However, some writers suggest that the basic qualities of liberalism stand in direct contradiction to the communitarian values implicit in the rhetoric of learning

community, making development of an authentic learning community, as opposed to one in name and policy only, challenging and problematic (Everhart, 1993; Merz & Furman, 1997). Raywid (1993) dissents with this opinion and cites pedagogical moments when self-study and a focus on individualism occurred concurrently with engagement in community building activities. This concurs with the idea that "the self is socially constructed, and an emphasis upon community is the basis upon which the individual learns to be there for the other" (Orr, p. 35). Packer and Goicoechea (2000) deal with some of these concepts in their discussion of ontology and epistemology, developing arguments and observations around the statement that learning involves becoming a member of a community, and that the person is constructed in a social context, through practical activity, and formed in relationships of desire and recognition that can split the person, motivating the search for identity.

The descriptions, characteristics, and language of learning community theory are communitarian in nature. Communitarianism is a philosophy that places the needs and the values of the community in a position of primacy over those of the individual. Typically, literature on learning communities embraces a sense of moral obligation (Sergiovanni, 1999), and an ethic toward caring for others (Deiro, 1997; Noddings, 1988; Staszenski, 1995) that is reflected in the communitarian ideals. These concepts also parallel the characteristics of the *gemeinschaftlich* community. Merz and Furman (1997) point out that "commitments between people in *Gemeinschaft* are taken for granted rather than intentionally chosen," that "lack of choice is one of the hallmarks of gemeinschaft,

and people have often complained of feeling 'stuck' in traditional small towns and villages" (pp. 13–14, formatting in original).

There is a fundamental philosophical tension in the suggestion that a public institution conceived originally as an agent of socialization in a liberal society should be structured around a communitarian political philosophy (Merz & Furman, 1997). This seems to be more than the subtle shift in approach suggested earlier. However, Merz and Furman note that North Americans have traditionally sought out community through voluntary civic and religious groups as a way of bridging the gap between individualism and society, and the decline of these has resulted in a major de-socializing force. Perhaps members of the society at large long for renewed *gemeinschaftlich* relationships, providing the impetus for a renewed commitment to learning communities (Noddings, 1996).

For learning communities to remain fully congruent with the public arena that they serve, society would have to move toward a communitarian ethos as a primary social organizer. This does not appear likely in an era marked by corporate dominance and economic rationalism. Cocklin (1999) and Hindle and Sedo (2000) suggest in their research that the development of learning communities can be successful, particularly in small rural schools that are homogenous in composition and have a supportive and active external community, suggesting that this success is predisposed when it occurs in settings that already lean toward a more communitarian ethic. Merz and Furman (1997) go further by suggesting that a major problem with learning community theory is that it appears to

have limited transferability to larger school settings, but that it can work well in idiosyncratic settings that are often small schools or alternative schools (Raywid, 1993).

Concerns about lost liberty and autonomy are occasionally addressed by scholars, primarily in terms of teacher autonomy, and sometimes disparagingly, as if teacher autonomy is a hindrance to innovation and pedagogical growth. One study of collaboration among primary school teachers refers to the "legendary autonomy" of the teacher, and notes that collaboration among her participant teachers was more acceptable when it did not encroach on the sanctity of the classroom (Sugrue, 1999, p. 259). Wells (1999) reminds us that change takes time and that teachers are people who have never left school and therefore can't be blamed for holding with previous mental models of schooling. Another attempt to deal with the concern suggests that a balance between the sense of community and the sense of individualism is all that is required. Johnson (1999) notes that learning communities are based on engendering commitments that lead to intrinsic motivation as opposed to practices of manipulation and coercion.

Perhaps Noddings (1988) goes furthest in her attention to this concern. She proposes the idea that we are never truly autonomous, because we are in fact always shaped relationally by others' support and influence. In this frame, teachers exhibit an ethic of caring when they enable students to practice responsible self-affirmation.

In this writing, Noddings does not directly engage the juxtaposition between communitarian classroom organization and school's responsibility to create future citizens capable of autonomy, but she does provide a tidy rationale for a blending of philosophy. In later writing, Noddings (1996) reengages this tension and advocates a

cautious building of community that avoids the *dark side* of community—conformity, coercion, and the like—by cultivating aspects of several philosophical sub-traditions. She discusses the unavowable community, with its emphasis on listening and preserving the speech and identity of the Other, and those branches of feminist thought that recognize the primacy of relation. She states that both of these sub-traditions reject power in its primary form as power over others, and could perhaps be used to balance issues of domination within community.

These attempts to respond to the apparent paradox between community and autonomy do not alleviate the danger that school leaders and policy makers will wholeheartedly embrace the notion of community and deliberately set out to create them. As Coombe (1999) notes, a community is shaped by a set of values and beliefs that guide interactions and daily living. As a result, learning communities can quickly become an avenue for advancing the biases of any particularly powerful enclave. There is the possibility that these values may be in conflict with the personal morality and ethical standards of some members, leading to the very isolation and disengagement that the proponents of learning communities intended to address in the first place. Merz and Furman (1997), in their excellent discussion of the historical context of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, reveal that as urbanization occurred during the Industrial Revolution, more people experienced significantly increased liberty with the falling away of the claustrophobic *gemeinschaftlich* relations to which they were accustomed, reflecting some of the potency of Coombe's concerns.

The inherent tension between the benefits of community development in schools and the possible resulting decline in autonomy needs exploration by more advocates of the learning community. However there is much to be gained in this proposal of caring pedagogical relationships and professional learning communities, and much to be admired in the intent. It has long been recognized that trust and collaboration are hallmarks of some very effective learning and instructional styles. Certainly, the images of close pedagogical and professional relationships would have appeal for the many students and educators who feel alienated and lonely within the institution of school.

The preceding themes, of caring pedagogical relationships, professional learning communities, and the philosophical tensions behind learning communities, appear fairly consistently in the works of a wide variety of authors. However, in most of the theoretical work there is little mention of alternative schools such as outreach schools or the development of community in these schools. This seems paradoxical when, as noted earlier, small or alternative schools experience notable success in building learning communities.

In addition, there is another element that contributes to the development of learning communities that is rarely acknowledged: the *place* in which the community evolves. Deal and Peterson (1999) devote some of their discussion of building school communities to the place itself: the architecture, design, and décor of a school. They introduce the notion that place can either help or hinder the development of community, and can symbolically express the values of the learning community. This theme does not frequently appear in the literature even though many writers use Tonnies' gemeinschaft

and gesellschaft, noting that Tonnies advanced the idea that *gemeinschaft* often depended on a place of meeting, or a common habitat, such as a school or other neighbourhood place. My experience within the outreach school has taught me that this is an aspect of learning community that is fundamental, and so I turned to cultural geography for further exploration.

Outreach Schooling: An Educational Commons

In this section, I review the available literature on outreach schools through the context of writings on place and space. I also explore the literature that suggests outreach schools are vital educational alternatives because of the way they re-imagine pedagogical space, and the potential effects such a re-imagination can have on the development of learning community.

A Changing World

The metaphor of the commons is derivative of the notion of the village, as discussed by Mugerauer (1994) and Caragata (1998). Caragata relates a narrative of a village well, where inhabitants typically leave their pails. If a neighbour comes to get water, then one has an excuse to go and have a chat. This is an important analogy for understanding the contemporary outreach school and the context in which it exists. In relating his narrative of a village water-well, Caragata suggests that sometimes we use pretence to initiate participation in the public life. Such is the case in the outreach school. It serves as a center for a wide variety of programs and people come to interact for a

variety of purposes, in a function analogous to the village well. In a similar vein, Raywid (1993) borrows the theory of 19th century sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies to illustrate the concept of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, placing the alternative school within the community context. She suggests that,

> members of a gemeinschaft community have emotional ties to one another and are linked by shared values and beliefs, recurring interaction with one another, mutual dependence and a shared commitment to a particular place. (p. 29)

In contrast, gesellschaft groupings are associated with features we can readily see in a globalized society, and are characterized by instrumental and functional interactions. Raywid (1993) explains that the interactions of *gesellschaft* groupings are far more superficial and fleeting, limited to specific purposes, dominated by individual self-interest and governed by rules rather than by common understandings of ethical relations. She suggests that alternative schools closely resemble *gemeinschaft* communities because of their powerful sense of community (p. 23). The outreach school can be seen as learning community commons because it provides both the reason and the forum to encourage discourse, and strengthen the bonds of community.

Defining Outreach

The term "outreach schools," often called alternative schools in early literature, has in decades past referred to programs for those students unable to competently operate in mainstream schools (Cox & Davidson, 1995; Sagor, 1999). Although alternative schools have seen many incarnations, the term outreach usually refers to schools or

separate district programs that create a more positive learning environment through low teacher-student ratios, independent, self-paced instruction, and non-competitive assessment, utilizing more one on one assistance (Bouska, 2001; Housego, 1999; Raywid, 1993). One interesting element of alternative school philosophy is that there exists, in an era where the homogenization of public places is in rapid advance (Caragata, 1998; Mugerauer, 1994; Relph, 1976), the understanding that one size does not fit all. The outreach school often attempts to facilitate student exposure to local business, recreational and arts communities, (Shewchuk, 2001) and carves out new pedagogical space by accessing and elaborating the 'porosity' (Holloway & Valentine, 2000) between the home and school learning environments. The last published survey of Alberta outreach school administrators tallied approximately 5000 students being served (Alberta Learning, 2001). This survey described the attributes of the typical outreach program in Alberta congruently with the literature mentioned above.

A New Pedagogical Place

The *place* of education is possibly one of the most obvious differences between traditional schooling and alternative schooling. It is common for outreach program sites to bear little resemblance to traditional schools. Plants, ambient or natural lighting and comfortable informal seating are incorporated into some outreach centers. Others have kitchen and nursery facilities. Sometimes, they are housed in hand-me-down spaces, which can be allocated by school boards because it is cheap, or has no other purpose (Gregory, 2001). Often, outreach centers are located close to main streets and dense

population centers, with easy access to public transportation and businesses (Johnston, 2001; Van Slyke, 2001). In the best situations, outreach educators have been able to work to fashion a pedagogical space that creates a sense of welcome, is aesthetically comfortable, and fosters authentic pedagogical relationships (Van Slyke, 2001). This forms part of the *extrapersonal* space, the spatial domain in which we work and learn. In his exploration of pedagogical spaces, Evans (1999, p. 119) recalls his remembrances of school places, and suggests that "space always has a certain ambiance or tonal quality…(and is) never simply experienced by children as simply or purely space." He suggests that atmosphere is a pedagogically potent phenomenon, and that educators need to show concern for the ways in which students experience the place of school. In her discussion of alternative schools, Raywid asserts that "we must change the experience of school- the way it looks, tastes, and smells, and the reactions it produces in those who are there" (2001, p. 582). For this reason, outreach schools often strive for a place and atmosphere distinct from typical school settings. Seamon (1979) refers to distinctiveness as "a sense of being a distinct entity in the midst of a larger environment…related to the people and activities of place (that) generate a special regularity, dynamism and atmosphere that attract new users and bring back regular participants over and over again" (p. 148). This is an apt description for the type of outreach school described above. In this way, outreach educators deliberately use space to develop a sense of community.

The aesthetic and ergonomic quality of the environment communicates educators' valuation of students (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Gregory, 2001). Relph (1993) refers to this

quality as the 'generosity' of a place and suggests that it is an aspect of place-making that is essential to the building of community. In one outreach school, a significant enrolment increase was noted after relocation to a more attractive and accessible site, and following cosmetic renovations (Fred Fehlauer, personal communication, January 31, 2003). This kind of environment supports the educational commons, where students and educators meet each other, for casual personal interaction, and for purposeful pedagogical interaction. Ellis (2002, p. 69) states that "pedagogically, place can be understood as facilitating nurturance, especially through meaningful relationships", and many outreach schools embrace this understanding. Of the little research that has been done regarding outreach schools (see Cox & Davidson, 1995), there is a remarkable consistency in the idea that caring, authentic and co-negotiated relationships are characteristic of outreach arrangements, and something valued by outreach students and teachers (Alberta Learning, 2001; Beattie, 1999; Housego, 1999). Hay (1992) argues that we establish meaningful relationships with places as a result of our being-in-place with others, and states "researching meaningful relationships around the concept of "place" would provide a contextual basis to organize information that involves human meaning" (p. 100). It is clear that caring relationships must develop in a mutual location that supports the pedagogical activity of bonding. This parallels the idea introduced earlier that *gemeinschaft* relationships often depend on a place of meeting, or a common habitat.

Interpersonal Spaces

Literature on outreach schooling and cultural geography feature the common theme that children have a lack of power in their lived realities. As Holloway and Valentine (2000) note "social space is never merely a neutral location" (p. 770). Healthy child development is fostered by children's ability to adapt and appropriate space for creativity. As children grow older they seek more freedom, decreased proximity from authority figures and more direct control over components of their own lives (Polakow & Sherif, 1987). One of the characteristics of outreach schools is the levelling of the power differential within the site of learning, and within the pedagogical relationship (Raywid, 1993). In typical school arrangements, students may feel alienated within an environment in which they have only the tiniest element of control, and endure largely superficial relationships with those in control. Institutions, such as schools, tend to exert control both spatially and temporally, by scheduling and routinizing activities according to external constraints (Allen, 1995; Eyles, 1989). In contrast, students at outreach schools have reported a sense of having voice and control over decisions and form an integral part of planning and directing their own educational goals, and the timetable of completion (Beattie, 1999; Housego, 1999). Hay (1992), Noddings (1996) and Deal and Peterson (1999) maintain that the development of rituals within a place builds ties to that place. Without temporal and spatial controls, students must develop their own rituals surrounding learning, study and instruction, and make independent decisions to become autonomous participants, rather than observers, in their own educational accomplishments. This re-imagining of the pedagogical space may be seen as one attempt

to address the dichotomy between coercion and autonomy that are characteristic of traditional schools, and an important tension in the literature on learning communities.

The theme of caring pedagogical relationships that is fundamental to the arguments for learning communities also appears in writing about outreach schools. Students valued the friendliness and respectfulness of their teachers (Beattie, 1999; Housego, 1999). Generally, alternative education teachers tend to adopt a 'gentler teaching', as advocated by Haberman (1994). Outreach students and teachers tend to engage in relationships that have a higher degree of mutuality, and these often develop in the absence of mandatory attendance. In some outreach centers, students come and go as they please, and are often able to choose the activities that they will engage in while there. The locus of control shifts and with it, student empowerment is enhanced. These structures tend to help students build identity and agency, and foster relationships that allow them to develop autonomy (Raywid, 1993).

The distinctive place of the outreach school is fundamental to the process of building learning community. A relationship with a school place that lacks coercion requires a student to take ownership and responsibility for their own successes and failures, and in this manner exercise citizenship within the community. Eyles (1989) reminds us that individuals create and creatively transform themselves, often in response to a place, and that place is "vital for the establishment of personal identity" (p.108). The experience of the place is an essential backdrop to the relationships that develop there. In his research regarding teenagers' uses and perceptions of place, Childress (2000) reported that students spoke with passion about how place figures into their self-image:

> They loved the places that made them feel better about themselves, the places that helped tell stories in which they were secure, capable, attractive. They loathed the places that made them feel like failures; places that made it clear that no one cared, places that demanded what they could not give. And they were torn by painful and precarious places that carried conflicting stories…These narrative acts of imagination are the sole difference between a "space" and a "place." We plan and build spaces, but we always and only inhabit places. (p. 262)

Part of identity is based on the presence of others, and these interactions with others take place in a location that is value-rich and emotionally laden. Mugerauer (1994) supports this, stating that individuals take up a place in their community through social roles. It is through the re-imagined roles of student and teacher that students engage interpersonal spaces as a fundamental part of the learning process, and as a way of engaging in the learning community.

A Community of Place

Outreach schools are by no means the panacea for all the ills affecting the public education system, but they can afford students and teachers a sense of belonging, and create an authentic place for a learning community to flourish (Beeson, 2001). Community can be defined as a territorial or geographical unit, or it can refer to the quality of human relationships and sense of belonging within organizational boundaries (Osterman, 2000). Outreach schools exist as learning communities of place first and foremost because it is through the geographical and pedagogical spaces characteristic of

outreach schools that relationship and other aspects of community form. I have previously suggested the following points. As students are allowed to make the choice to attend and to belong, they can escape the coercive and conformist nature of regular schools and form more authentic relationships with both people and places. Students then develop a greater sense of autonomy and agency as they negotiate degrees of participation in the learning community. As a result of these elements, I would suggest that the learning community within the outreach school is derived quite differently than in typical school arrangements, and this derivation is dependent on the place of the community.

Relph (1993) suggests that place includes a "pattern of social activities that should be adapted to the advantages or virtues of a particular location, and a set of personal and shared meanings" (p. 34), implying the argument that community and place are intertwined. Eyles (1989) also notes that place can be seen as being of intrinsic importance, as a center of felt value and an arena for everyday life, which ultimately provides meaning to life. He asserts that the rhythms of everyday life, as they occur in time and space, allow us to construct and be constructed in the reflections and reactions of others, which form the basis of sociality and the dialectical relationship between the individual and society. This is at the heart of the matter of the outreach school community. It is in the rhythms of everyday interactions, enveloping a multiplicity of life worlds, that the outreach school develops a sense of community. Seamon (1979) refers to this aspect of dwelling in a place as *place ballet* and suggests "community almost certainly arises of the place" (p. 143). Relph concurs with this, stating "we are linked to

our places by patterns of activities that are so varied and subtle that they cannot all be identified" (1993, p. 35). This harkens back to the village well mentioned earlier. There are observable time-space routines, but the underlying, symbolic meaning may not be readily visible to an outsider. Clearly, place is intricately woven into a community, serves as an expression of that community, and represents a place to conduct communal affairs.

By looking at ideas in writing on outreach school communities and cultural geography that overlap and return to each other, it becomes evident that some of the same themes and concerns inform both discourses. There is an awareness that a community of place shapes and is shaped by its spatial reality; that the ambience, distinctiveness and generosity of a place can encourage people to be there, transforming it into a place. The aesthetics of a space can be seen to be symbolic of the values of the community, and can be seen as a potent pedagogical force, particularly in cases where young people can increase their own sense of agency and control through determining their participation. Much of this literature focuses on the effects of place and a sense of belonging in place for individuals, and place as a site for relationships to develop and deepen. Literature from both discourses generally advocates an increased awareness of the effects of place on individuals, and on the relationships that form in those places. These aspects echo some of the primary considerations of a narrative inquiry methodology.

Narrative inquiry invites researchers and participants to attend to a research topic through a deliberate awareness of a three dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The three dimensions are: an awareness of place and context, time and the workings of memory and anticipation, and the awareness of relationships within a

context. From the inception of this research, it seemed that some of the main precepts of narrative inquiry ran parallel to my interest in learning communities, which form through relationships, in a shared time and place. For this reason, I turned to the literature about the method and methodology of narrative inquiry for further understanding. In the following chapter, I will review some of this literature and delineate my own understanding of this research approach, as well as explain my experience of being in the research field.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Like much educational research, my inquiry stems from personal experience, in this case, the experience of teaching in an outreach school. During this period in my teaching career, I experienced what Ellis (1998) calls "being jarred into taking conscious responsibility for how we have interpreted someone or something" (p. 6). Certainly it was a jarring experience, raising many questions about the assumptions I had of learning communities and causing me to question the teacher's role within. As I perused the literature on learning communities, I noticed a lack of mention of outreach schools and yet this is the place in my own practice where I had been most aware of a sense of community. Through this study I hoped to better understand teachers' experiences of the learning community within an outreach school setting.

Starting Points

Jardine (1998) suggests interpretive work "begins with a different sense of the *given,*" the place where we encounter the incident in the first place, and part of the task of interpretation is to "bring out this evocative given" by following those things which are ambiguous, have significance for us and "reveal something to us about our lives together" (p. 40). Since I have lived uncertainly within the outreach learning community, I have been very interested in the experiences of other outreach educators.

A good place to start thinking about this inquiry is through the notion of hermeneutics. Because I share a common experience with other members of the outreach

community, I can imagine our shared and co-constructed understanding through the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle (Ellis, 1998; Smith, 1991). The hermeneutic circle or arc as it is sometimes referred to, is a concept of exploration that allows each participant to acknowledge their own "horizon" or "prejudices," (Ellis, 1998, p. 8) and the changing, shifting nature of one's own horizon as one encounters a fusion of horizons. In hermeneutic practice, language plays a dual role as both a medium and a tool for constructing meaning, and close attention is paid to the collective meaning-making role of language. In this sense the researcher must attend carefully to language itself.

As part of my preparation for this research, I kept a journal about my experiences at the outreach school in an attempt to articulate my "forestructures, existing preoccupations, pre-understandings or prejudices, including purposes, interests and values" (Ellis, 1998, p. 26). The use of autobiographical mining is important to both hermeneutics and narrative inquiry. Smith (1991, p. 198) notes "here is a profoundly ethical aspect to hermeneutic inquiry in a life-world sense; namely, a requirement that a researcher be prepared to deepen her or his own self-understanding in the course of the research." Jardine (1998) states that interpretive inquiry can be seen as a pedagogical art because it entails a transformation of self-understanding. It was an essential part of my preparation for research that I engage in knowing the story of myself in the outreach learning community.

In keeping with interpretive traditions, hermeneutics aspires not to providing final answers or solutions, but to a generativity of meaning, an uncovering of further questions (Ellis, 1998; Jardine, 1998). Hermeneutics also involves a playing back and forth

between part and whole, as a part of the hermeneutic arc (Smith, 1991). It is my sense that this is central to understanding the meanings for people within a community, a community within a larger institution such as education. To think about this inquiry as a spiral, with levels and layering of progressive uncovering (Ellis, 1998), encourages the situation and participants to reveal themselves, and the research itself to respond to this uncovering. In this sense, I can "learn from the experiences of familiarity in the strange and the strangeness in the familiar" (Bateson, 2000, p. 225).

As Smith (1991) notes, hermeneutics is "a way of thinking and acting that is acutely aware of the storied nature of human experience" (p. 201). However, although hermeneutics maintains emphasis on both recursive and reflective elements, it is not generally understood to be relational. I felt it vital to the study to focus on co-negotiated and collaborative storytelling and so I turned to narrative inquiry for further direction in my research.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is both a methodology and a way of thinking about phenomenon by inquiring into the experiences of research participants within that phenomenon. Carter (1993) suggests "story represents a way of knowing and thinking . . . that accommodates ambiguity and dilemma as central figures and themes" (p. 6). She believes that narrative is a profoundly suitable way of conducting inquiry into teaching because "teachers' knowledge is event structured" and that "teaching events are framed within a context of a teacher's life history" (p. 7). Polkinghorne (1995)

concurs that "narrative is the linguistic form uniquely suited for displaying human existence as situated action . . . as purposeful engagement in the world" (p. 5). From my position as a teacher researcher, I believe that "teacher knowledge is narratively composed, embodied in a person, and expressed in practice" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 174). Clandinin and Connelly offer a working definition of narrative inquiry that has shaped my conduct throughout this study:

> Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories and experiences that make up people's lives. (p. 21)

Narrative inquiry takes place in what Clandinin and Connelly describe as the three dimensional inquiry space.

The Three Dimensional Inquiry Space

There are stories that people tell, lives that tell stories, stories that we live by, and the story of engaging in relational research. The three dimensional space maintains awareness of the temporal, spatial, and relational context of the inquiry. To understand narrative inquiry as a space of three-dimensional inquiry, it is important to understand experience as inherently storied and perceived though the lens of a storied self. The narrative inquirer sees experience as filtered through the stories that are

embedded within us from our remembered past, our present reality, the meta-narratives of the society we live in, and our anticipated future. In this way, our experiences and projections are perceived through narratives and simultaneously are incorporated into our narrative. Experience is not a series of discrete events, but better described as "gain(ing) denseness and elusiveness precisely through a continuous contextualizing or meshing of part to a changing whole" (Kerby, 1991, p. 16). In this sense, we are always reconstructing both the stories of ourselves and our story of the world we live in, and this process is dependent on time. Part of our role is to engage the part and the whole of our experiences to make meaning from them.

The Context of Time

Temporal location is one of the three dimensional spaces within which narrative inquiry occurs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The nature of time upon our understanding of experiences is central: how a researcher or a participant perceives events and themselves within those events takes place in a now that is fleeting. Crites (1971), quoting Augustine of Hippo, suggests that there are three times, "a present of things past, a present of things present, (and a) present of things future" (p. 301). Crites explains that these three modalities of experience are correlative to one another in every moment of experience, and it is only from the standpoint of the present that one can reflect on the past or the future. Time becomes the vantage point from which we tell stories of ourselves and of our experiences, a survey point from which to perceive the whole of our experiential landscape. As Ellis (1998, p. 9) puts it

"Understanding is always temporal, since, as our prejudices change and our language changes, so do the interpretations we can make."

LeGuin (1989) feels that narrative in general can be seen as "an active encounter with the environment by means of posing options and alternatives" within a temporal context, and states that "it is a means, a way of living . . . (that) asserts, affirms, participates in directional time, time experienced, time as meaningful" (p. 44, 39). For a narrative inquirer then, awareness of temporal location is important, for as we use recollection and anticipation to move back and forth in time our perceptions change and the same is true for our participants. This is also an aspect of hermeneutics which frames the concept of seeking and re-seeking understanding as a circle or an arc (Ellis, 1998; Smith, 1991). This exploration must necessarily take place in time, and part of the reframing of understanding is a function of time. It is an important element of this research that the journey of my own experience in the outreach school, from induction to departure, paralleled my engagement in the various stages of this project, just as it is important that I wrote the final representations after I had left my own outreach school. In this way, time and memory act powerfully on the lens of perspective.

Perhaps this awareness of time is a way of acknowledging that as researchers we can only attempt to understand a particular case from a point in time. From a personal standpoint, this also becomes essential. I am aware of myself as a researcher at various points in time, whose perceptions have changed with this same fleetness of moment. It is partly for this reason that narrative inquirers often frame their research

context as a puzzle rather than as a problem to be solved (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). A research problem implies an answer with some definitiveness, but a puzzle is one that is continually unfolding or unwinding.

The Context of Place

The second aspect of the three dimensional narrative inquiry field is the place dimension, an aspect of narrative that directly addresses one of the concerns of learning community. Just as all human experience occurs within a context of time, so it also occurs within a context of places. As I argued to considerable degree in chapter two, place is at the heart of the matter of community in the outreach school, but also a primary consideration in the creating of narrative inquiry field texts. Polkinghorne (1995, p. 7) states "A storied narrative . . . preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts." I understand experience and the researching of experience as storied through the context of both time and place. This component of narrative inquiry allows the researcher to explore experience as its own unit of interest within a specific context of conditions, rather than as an attempt to validate an existing theory or provide ground for generalization.

The Context of Relation

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define one final dimension in the three dimensional narrative inquiry field and that is the relational dimension, involving

both the social and the personal, a dimension that flows both inward and outward. I have attempted, in part, to acknowledge this relational dimension in the title of this research text. "Reaching in" and "reaching out" are phrases that evoke the essence of relationships that outreach teachers have within the learning community, the ongoing experience of one's identity evolution, and the relational aspect between participants and myself as we attempted to uncover some of what it means to be an outreach educator. Inquiry begins in the midst of things and it is imperative for the researcher to attend carefully to the rich social fabric already in place, but also to the way they become part of that sociality, the way a narrative inquirer settles in to "live and work alongside participants" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 67). This requires careful negotiation of relationships and purposes and transitions in and out of the site of inquiry that consider all involved. Relationships embed meaning into the field texts and it is important to note relational contexts as part of attending to the peripheral elements of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Part of the relational dimension is acknowledging the inner personal place as the researcher and participants respond to the process of engaging in the inquiry. The importance of this inner dimension encompasses both researcher and participants and may form a vital part of the dialogue as the inquiry progresses, helping to maintain a collaborative atmosphere. Bateson (2000) reminds us "stories evoke participation, spoken or unspoken. Personal anecdotes invite the listener to reflect on the familiar and turn it through different angles of refraction, perhaps many times" (p. 241). It is in this sense

that narrative inquiry is both reflective and recursive, and also emphasizes the relational aspect.

Participants and inquirers in a research project will be affected by research and possibly changed through the uncovering and co-constructing of our own and others' narratives. In fact, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state "our principal interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life story that we as researchers and our participants author" (p. 71). Narrative inquiry demands an awareness of the fluid nature of the relationship between researcher and participants the nature of which is always being renegotiated and which must be done so within an ethic of care (Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Weber (1986) reflects on the elements of risk, trust, and betrayal in research relationships and makes an excellent argument for maintaining human dignity and authentic engagement from the moment of invitation onward. There is the understanding that while one may develop an intimate relationship with people and places within the inquiry, "there are always points where the intermingling of narrative threads has loose ends off the landscape" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 72) and this is part of the context of the inquiry, a relational story within the many stories in that time and place. Carson (1986, p. 83) refers to this as a "community of cooperative investigation." Connelly and Clandinin (1990) insist that the narrative inquirer listen first to the practitioner's story to allow this story space and so that it gains the authority and validity that the research story has long enjoyed. It is important to consider this type of research as a shared narrative unity, a common thread in the lives of both participants and researchers, and to emphasize the equality

between participants and researchers so as to empower the telling of stories that may have been long silenced.

Sacred Stories, Self-stories, and Others

The above suppositions resonate with my own teaching experiences at an outreach school. From my journaling, I can trace how my understandings have changed over time and how the story of me as an outreach educator is also constantly shifting with new experiences and observations. My initial perceptions of the outreach center were filtered through a narrative of public education that is institutionalized into our society and has possibly become, in the words of Crites (1971) a "sacred story . . . stories that orient the life of people through time, their life-time, their individual and corporate existence and their sense of style (which) carry the authority of scripture for the people who understand their own stories in relations to them" (p. 295). Sacred stories are often not articulated, but so embedded into our understanding of our world that it is fundamental to the way in which we enact our own *mundane stories*; those stories that are seen, heard, told, and lived.

An understanding of sacred stories can be positioned alongside the notion of *habitus*, a "history turned into nature," a "structuring structure" which features "sedimented values, beliefs and attitudes," "the unity of which must be accounted for by similar environmental conditions and prevailing cultural traditions" (Kerby, 1991, p. 20). The notion of habitus reminds me that students and teachers who place themselves in an outreach center may also be choosing to redefine their own stories in

a way that is not congruent with the dominant narrative of public education. Bruner (1987) proposes that the ways in which people voice and conceptualize their lives become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself through past, present, and future. Grumet (1991, p. 69) notes that "We are, at least partially, constituted by the stories we tell to others and to ourselves about experience." Witherell and Noddings (1991, p. 1) confirm this, "The stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture."

Narrative inquiry is one way of bringing to the surface other voices and other stories not typically represented in dominant narratives. Coles (1989) examines this aspect of narrative by suggesting that theory may be used as a *token of loyalty* to grand narratives and as a way of explaining *away* people rather than focusing on them as individuals. Carter (1993) makes the observation that narrative inquiry can be a method of challenging images of teaching and teachers that have come from the quantitative realm, and that narrative is a strong vehicle for hearing diverse voices. Narrative inquiry allows for the acknowledgment that individual stories and voice have value when we remember that stories occur "within a community in which readers make something of them" and are "constructions that give a meaning to events and convey a particular sense of experience" (Carter, 1993, p. 8). bell hooks (1997) explores this idea with respect to her own experiences as a black female writer and suggests a need for "counternarratives which offer diverse representations" (p. xviii). I hope to reveal those counternarratives that exist within the outreach school, the alternate stories that challenge the dominant

narrative of education and inform the daily lives of outreach school teachers. In this spirit, I have engaged the stories that exist quietly in the margins of the public education system in the outreach school experience.

Narrative inquiry acknowledges the experiences and understandings of the researcher as part of the inquiry space; there is often a strong autobiographical quality to narrative research. It is for this reason that narrative becomes an appropriate way to approach my inquiry. I believe my own experience in an outreach center to be invaluable in my role as a researcher and hope I have created a text that makes visible my own narratives of learning and teaching in an outreach center alongside those of my participants.

Structure of the Study

Research was conducted with a deliberately maintained awareness of the three-dimensional inquiry space. By this I mean that I regularly and deliberately attended to awareness of time, relationship, and the context of the field site. In keeping with the characteristics of narrative inquiry, I limited the number of participants to three, with myself included as a participant. The decision to limit the number of participants came from within the context of the research. After entering the lives of Ron and Charlotte, my two participants, and getting a sense of the richness of the field sites, I decided not to seek other participants. Narrative inquiry tends toward looking deeply at individuals' experiences within their contexts and I was concerned that the inclusion of another participant might stretch my attention too thin. It is difficult to maintain *wakefulness* in

the field. Since narrative inquiry often invokes in a researcher a kind of tension at the boundaries of formalism and reductionism (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I was concerned that with more participants I might fall into thinking about them as a research set, rather than as individuals. Part of this decision was practical in nature as well. While I was attempting to immerse myself in the two field sites, I was also teaching in my own outreach school and was conducting those relationships and reflections that would become important to my understanding. Narrative inquiry requires a sustained relationship and I wanted to ensure that I had the personal resources to maintain a high level of involvement with the participants should the research go in that direction. I decided to attend carefully to the worlds of three individuals, myself and two others, because I felt that three participants would provide an optimal balance of richness and variety.

Composing Stories

Upon my entering the field, the participants and I negotiated a tentative routine that fit for each of us, with occasional exception. I visited Ron and Charlotte's respective schools each week for the last 6 weeks of school, usually during the evening session which was often the busiest part of the day, and also visited each site during the daytime. In the case of Rosedale, this daytime visit gave me an opportunity to see classes in addition to the typical drop-in tutorial approach. Each of these school visits lasted between 3 and 4 hours. I visited Rosedale Outreach School on 7 days, and Granville Learning Centre on 5 days. In addition to the time spent there during operational hours,

Ron and I also conducted our conversations, both taped and not taped, at the school. Charlotte and I sometimes used the school or met in other locations. After the initial data collection period, the participants and I dialogued through email and unrecorded conversations during occasional visits.

Conversation denotes discourse having fewer boundaries. It reduces the control of the researcher (Weber, 1986) and allows for a maieutic quality, resulting in an "uncovering of the question to which the problem statement is an answer" (Carson, 1986, p. 76). This promotes greater authentic engagement on the part of both researcher and participant (Weber, 1986), shaping a moral discourse among colleagues who are members of the community (Carson, 1986). Some conversations between the participants and I were recorded via audiotape. These conversations were informal, allowing participants to co-negotiate the direction of a conversation that evoked the lived experience (Weber, 1986). I composed sample topics before some of the taped conversations to give a tentative shape to the recorded conversations, sometimes in response to a conversation we had started but not finished, or sometimes in response to my observations and reactions in the field sites. These questions provided a starting point, but then were often quickly abandoned as the conversation found its own rhythm and direction.

Revealing conversations occur without planning; about three quarters of our dialogue was captured on tape, still other conversations have been represented in field notes which then became part of a confirmatory dialogue, often through the medium of email. In these confirmatory conversations, we clarified and extended our understanding

of earlier conversations. The taped conversations vary in length, from 25 minutes, to an hour and a half long recorded conversation. Some of these occurred at the outreach school sites and others offsite. I tape recorded conversations totalling 3 hours with each participant.

In composing research texts, I worked from field texts including various forms of field notes, personal histories, and email letters. In field notes, I attempted to construct notes that combined my personal practical knowledge with active reconstruction rather than a passive recording (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I also used audio recorded conversations, the associated transcripts, email letters, maps of the school, time diagrams and time charts, school brochures, displays, policy statement documents, and autobiographical writing. As Carson (1986) notes, autobiographical reflection is an important aspect of research in a conversational mode.

Field notes were initially composed at the research site, and then reconstructed within a researcher journal within a day or so after the site visit. The reconstructed field texts within this journal allowed me to note my reflections and my initial responses to what I was experiencing. In my researcher journal, I experimented with form. I retold events within the structure of an anecdote, I reconstructed conversations, which were later compared to transcripts, and I tried a parallel journal form with two columns that separated the facts of my observations in one column, and parallel reactions and personal responses on the other side. Ultimately, the choice of format for the various researcher journal pieces emerged from the content of the field notes I had taken that day. In these reconstructed field notes, I attempted to record

sensory observations, conversations, and the goings-on of the place, but also tried to record my own responses to what I was experiencing. Sometimes, the reconstructed field notes became a pastiche of the present experience and remembrances of the past. These texts evolved as the participants and I engaged and re-engaged them.

All field texts created that concerned the individual participants and their worksites were shared with the participants shortly after they were created, with the understanding that they could be revised as the participants indicated. These texts became part of the ongoing conversation, and in this way I could attend one of the concerns of narrative inquiry, that "leaving teachers out of the deliberative and expressive phases of research, not only creates communication gaps between teachers and researchers but also limits the quality and usefulness of educational research" (Florio-Ruane, 1991, p. 235).

On Being in the Field: In Retrospect

The research process in a narrative inquiry is an experience that is imbued with both a crystalline precision and a kind of fragmented messiness. I have spent a fair amount of time thinking about the various aspects of the process because I feel that it has changed me and my teaching practice profoundly. Many aspects of the research process inform my practice as it is evolving now. There were understandings built within the school communities visited, imagined through the literature I initially considered, and then challenged through the act of representation. I suppose I would prefer to avoid deconstruction, not try to evaluate each part of the experience to determine its impact,

and so I delineate the process for the reader with some reluctance. I feel a bit like I am telling tales of intimacy, a by-product of the falling in and out of love and slipping into cool contemplation inherent in narrative inquiry as referred to by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Nonetheless, I will try to explicate the goings on of this research through a window that is both essentially transparent and yet aware of my own reflection.

In retrospect, I recognize that I entered into relationships with both Charlotte and Ron with remarkable ease. I had made both of their acquaintance through a rapport built briefly during professional development activities. These were not established friendships, but the kind of joking camaraderie that develops when people meet at a conference. Based on this brief contact, I considered them as possible access points into locating participants and sites. For each, the response to my call seeking possible participants was to volunteer their own participation to my great delight. Neither showed any interest in having other members of their schools participate, so I did not seek other participants from these sites. Their enthusiasm and interest in participating confirmed my sense that there was a need for the research, but also made it a bit awkward for me to signal that we needed to backtrack to the formal induction of the research.

In addition to seeking approval from the district superintendents and each participant's respective school administration, I met with both Charlotte and Ron to go over the letters I had prepared describing the purposes and possible parameters of the research. We did not have long conversations about the letters, and at the time I felt uneasy, particularly with Ron, that they had not fully considered the personal implications of the commitment. I needn't have worried. Ron articulated clearly that

certain classroom routines would need to be followed to make sure that his students did not feel threatened or discomfited by my presence; Charlotte wanted to make sure I understood the limitations on her time. They knew that they would have copies and a degree of voice in the creation of field texts, transcripts, and any other material used in the preparation in chapters over which they would have final approval.

Negotiating the Relationship and Texts

The negotiation of each relationship was ongoing, informally engaged as questions came up. As much as possible, I asked participants to shape our interaction by having them designate places, times, and procedures for our conversations and the time I spent in their workplace. Both participants preferred to meet and conduct our conversations at their respective schools, so I sometimes experienced the field site in reasonable facsimile of the way I perceived that students might experience it. I, too, got a chance to sit beside these teachers in a one-on-one tutorial that was designed just for me. During my time in the schools, I tried hard to not get in the way, but also to be of use wherever it seemed practical and natural. I tried to help out with tasks in an effort to become part of the community, to maintain a usefulness, and in an effort to submerge myself in the "taken-for-grantedness" that occurs when one becomes an insider in a community (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 76).

Throughout the time of our work together, I have carried the responsibility to ensure that the stories shared by the participants retain the integrity and the intent of the original telling and to act with "concerned engagement" (Ellis, 1998, p. 34).

Collaboration in the construction of the field texts and interim texts was ongoing. As I collected and created field texts, a copy was forwarded to each of the participants. For example, as the recordings were transcribed, each participant was given copies of the transcriptions for checking and feedback or modification. As I reconstructed my field notes after each visit, I sent them electronic copies and invited their comments and revisions. During the construction of research texts, these were forwarded as drafts for comment and modification. Each participant was given opportunity to collaborate, but also the freedom to participate according to his or her interest and time. Although there was opportunity for further involvement, both participants elected to focus their participation in the various writing stages to confirming and re-confirming the representations I sent to them.

For the most part Ron did not want to discuss my field notes or drafts in any sustained way, but was happy to make references to specific changes or oversights he wished to see corrected. Through oblique references made during the time of our conversations, I knew he continued to read everything carefully and thought about how I had represented his world. However, he showed no desire to get involved with the wording or representation of his world. I worried about this initially, but even as I reiterated my invitation to revise or challenge my assumptions often and in different forms, I recognized that Ron trusted me to write it for him, that he was too busy in his own life and practice to engage in co-writing, but that he would let me know if I got it wrong.

At a meeting scheduled to discuss the first complete draft, I finally understood this. During this 3-hour meeting, we looked at pictures of a recent oversees holiday he had taken, talked about teaching, and just spent time together. In the middle of this time, we talked about the research and reminisced. Ron cleared up a misunderstanding about who served the food for the hot lunch program, and said, other than that, that I had "hit the nail on the head." He seemed pleased, and said, "Yeah, you got it pretty good, guess you know me pretty well." Ron clearly felt that the chapter representing his experiences was congruent with his own version of his teaching life. In his proposal that "the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative," Crites (1971) suggests that "action and experience interpenetrate," and that action, while temporal, can only be understood as a whole, performed "by bodies that are both subjects of experience and purposive agents" (pp. 291–292). I understand that for Ron, what was important was that I had understood him through his actions: his way of checking that for himself was through my representation. In many ways, I was a student for Ron; I see that the quiet talk we shared at his desk parallels the way he created a private tutorial space for each of his students. Perhaps that is part of how I had positioned myself from the onset in my own demeanour. There was a rare magic at work in front of me and I felt I was a student of the situation as much as the authors of that situation.

When working with Charlotte I also felt like an initiate and this helped me position myself humbly before her storytelling. Like myself, she was a classroom teacher of some experience, "gone outreach," and her level of joy and comfort in her outreach teaching practice was something that I admired and hoped to achieve. Charlotte was

engaging in her own dissertation writing during the time of my field research. For each of us, this created a unique situation of transparency regarding the research. Because our academic pursuits and our practices as outreach educators were mutually recognizable, we quickly became comfortable in conversation and simply being together at Granville Learning Centre.

During the time that I spent at Granville, Charlotte and I developed the habit of conversing a great deal, often conducting our private recorded conversations during lulls in student visits at the school. My reconstruction of Charlotte's world is based more on her own telling about her world than on direct observation, and this is further supported by the active role that Charlotte took when dialoguing via email with me about field notes. She also thoughtfully provided artefacts in the form of brochures, mission statements, and formal policy so that I could fully appreciate the complex story of the outreach school within the district. It was a providential aspect of the research that I continued to see Charlotte in other professional contexts and keep abreast of all of the pursuits in which she was involved. Charlotte's perspective on the importance of her work and the satisfaction she received from her work was catalytic in my embracing of my own teaching situation. In retrospect, I wished I had more insistently attempted to conduct more recorded conversations away from the place of the school. As Charlotte notes in reference to her teaching context, people are very different when they are at school as compared to when they are away from school. I wonder if another location might have provided additional richness to our conversations. However, each of the participants was conscious of their own time commitments, and though we did on

occasion meet away from the school socially, there did not seem to be many opportunities to combine the work and pleasure of the research.

Living in the Field

I spent 6 weeks attending weekly at each field site with little exception, usually for 3 to 4 hours at a time. During that time, I introduced myself to other staff and students in the way that had been modeled to me by the participant, and I engaged in conversations with the primary participant and other staff. I also engaged in casual conversations with students and occasionally tutored students where it seemed appropriate. I wrote field notes and generally tried to be unobtrusive to minimize the sense of spectatorship. I spent a great deal of time *looking and listening*, and then after constructing field notes, re-looking to see what I had missed. This is particularly true regarding my developing understanding of the importance of the place of the outreach school. Occasionally, I brought my own marking as camouflage and pretended to be engrossed so as to blend in with the scenery. For their part, Ron and Charlotte conducted business as usual, allowing me to participate in the ways described, but putting the needs of students first at all times. When there were no students present, we were able to record portions of our conversations. In this way, I managed to live and work alongside both Ron and Charlotte for a brief time. At the end of the school term, I took the field texts, artefacts, and my journaling about my experiences, the taped conversations, and transcripts and pored over them for the summer months.

Living in the River of Time

At the commencement of the next school year, I was approached to assume an administrative role at my own outreach school through a mentorship program. As I engaged in this leadership, my commitment to the outreach community became stronger. I liaised more actively with other outreach schools and became more active in the outreach educators specialist council, speaking about my research at their annual conference. During this school year, I was not able to devote much time to constructing interim research texts, but stayed in contact with Charlotte and Ron through email, occasional social meetings and site visits, and read, considered, and made initial scribblings on the field texts and transcripts, engaging the full body of data for each participant, examining smaller pieces countless times. In many ways, this year of increased participation in my practice as an outreach school educator was fundamental to my perspective on the research and I mention it here to acknowledge how my own perceptions were changing as a result of changes in my lifeworld. The following summer break, I began attempting to craft the data into something that might eventually be a research text. This embryonic progress was slowed drastically that fall when I left the outreach school community and accepted another position in a regular high school. In the spring of this first year back in the traditional school, 18 months after my initial field work, I took a leave of absence from my work in the classroom to concentrate solely on the representation of Ron and Charlotte's worlds.

During the initial planning of this research project, I had envisioned I would be writing the research texts from the place of classroom practice, partly because I

understood it might make for an interesting perspective to be re-immersed in the dominant metanarratives of public education while writing an account of outreach schools. I was accurate in anticipating it would have a noticeable effect, but I grew concerned partway through the first year back in the classroom that the in-school place I now inhabited was clouding the lens of perspective I had struggled to gain during the previous 3 years of research and teaching in the outreach school. The dominant discourse of public education threatened to overwhelm my understanding of those fragile new stories being lived and told at the margins of the educational system. For this reason, I choose to write the research texts from a place *out of school*, where for all intents and purposes I would belong to no school community. During this time, I visited at my former outreach workplace often to try to evoke my own memory and sense of myself in that place.

It is an important aspect of the research process for me to have taught in the traditional classroom prior to the conception of the study and immediately previous to the representation phase of the study. I was able to attend to my awareness of the classroom place of practice and its assumptions as well as the narrative of the outreach school. This dual centeredness has informed me during the representation phase of the research and was an integral part of negotiating a reality in-between worlds (Chamoiseau, 1994/97) and being at-home in a multiplicity of settings (Lugones, 1987).

During this representation period of about 4 months, I was in contact with both Ron and Charlotte more frequently, visiting Ron at Rosedale several times and seeing Charlotte at other professional events. As Charlotte had accepted another position in

southern Alberta, meeting at Granville Learning Centre was no longer appropriate. When we re-engaged, it seemed to me as if the time had not passed, partly because I had been entertaining both actual and imaginary conversations with them all the way along.

Releasing the Research Relationship, Easing into Friendship

When I consider the harmony and serendipity with which I have been allowed to participate in this research, I feel blessed. While I occasionally worried that Charlotte and Ron were disappointed at the slow pace of my writing, they were always supportive and understanding of the busyness of life and the demands of teaching. Both had by this time re-engaged with the traditional school community. Ron tried his hand in a rural secondary school, but returned to the outreach school the following September. Charlotte accepted a leadership position in a suburban high school where she continues to teach. They knew firsthand that the clock runs differently in regular schools. During the final stages of their involvement, I visited each one of them with a small gift. For Ron I chose a small plaque with an aphorism that compared teaching to tending a garden, and two flowering perennial plants, apt considering his love of landscaping and the tenderness with which he nurtured both his students and his garden. For Charlotte, I chose a set of pewter bottle stops to commemorate those rare and lovely conversations that took place over a bottle of red wine.

I don't consider these relationships over but having shifted, as Ron and Charlotte, who once were acquaintances, have now become friends and part of my own widening

professional community. I look forward to keeping in contact with them and allowing the relationships to continue naturally.

Issues of Form

Possibly one of the most uncertain aspects of this project was in the transition from field and interim texts to research texts. I became mired in considerations of form and audience, and felt a considerable tension when I tried to imagine my research text alongside other dissertations. I wanted to craft something that is at once impassioned and evocative, but that conforms to the standard dissertation expectations of an academic audience. As well, because of the personal conversational habits between me and the two other participants, the data set from each relationship is unique. For example, Ron positioned himself very deliberately as an informant. Possessing a background in clinical psychology, I believe he came with a set of assumptions about research relationships that minimized the dialogic element. He adopted a participant role that was revelatory and occasionally confessional. Charlotte's own recent work in a research relationship likely informed her own positioning as well. She tended more toward a more conversational style, but was more hesitant in taking control of the direction of the conversation. Despite considerable stylistic differences in the data set, the overarching concern for me was that whatever I composed should be written in a way that honoured the lives and practices of Charlotte and Ron, and form a text with which they could feel connected. For this last reason, there is some variance in the way in which I have composed the two participant chapters.

I arrived at an outline of a form for the participant chapters after a third intense period of engagement with the field texts. Over a period of several seasons, I had read and made notes and sketches and tried to notice parallels and points of meeting and departure within and among the transcripts, field notes, my own researcher journal, and personal practice journal. The assorted documents, maps, and school literature that I had collected also figured into my considerations. I selected the various headings that I have used to organize the following chapters after looking for recurring themes among the field texts and through revisiting the literature that I had read to prepare for the study and other topics that branched from my earlier readings. Many of the headings came from phrases or metaphors arising out of the conversations with Charlotte and Ron, phrases that continued to zing around my imagination long after I had left the field site.

I have tried to find a style and format that acknowledges the personal styles of the participants, tried to compose the text in the way I imagine they might have composed it themselves. Of considerable assistance was the admonishment of Penelope Peterson (1998) that we must learn to write, speak, and converse in ways that traverse the boundaries between our multiple roles within the educational community, and persuade others that as researchers we are down to earth, practical, and relevant. In this way, Peterson suggests, we can "participate democratically in the larger discourse" (p. 9). The text reflects choices that reflect my desire for research that is accessible and engaging for educators. I hoped outreach teachers would be able to read it and find resonance between the text and their own experiences, and that teachers living in the traditional school landscape would be intrigued to learn more.

Issues of Voice

Storytelling can be seen as a negotiation of power. The teller has the power of first utterance, but the listener has the tools of selectivity and appropriation with which to control the story. As Grumet (1991, p. 69) asserts, "Even telling a story to a friend is a risky business; the better the friend, the riskier the business. How many of you would like to get your own story back from a certain person?" I have attempted to mediate this space between "the self that tells, the self that told and the self that listens" through a process of transparency in intent and material, and to the best of my knowledge I have returned to my participants a story that is at once themselves but not, a story that "contains (the) self in good company" (p. 70).

To as great an extent possible, when composing a version of our conversations from the transcripts, I have retained the language habits and organization of the participants' speech, modifying only where neglect might impair the clarity of the text. Many of the longer sections have been adapted from several pages of transcripts because our conversations segued freely, often returning to the original point of departure some pages later. In the interest of clarity, I have omitted any transcript text that was off-topic or in response to an on-site distraction taking precedent, for example a phone call or another aspect of the work of the outreach school. Because research texts are by necessity a re-construction, I have spliced together different points in time of conversations to create a text which is sustained, but have done so with every care taken to retain the intent of the conversation. In addition, I have tried to create a transparency about my own

thinking for the reader so that he or she can separate my vantage point from that of the participants

Issues of Analysis

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, in my examination and representation of the data I looked "for patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes, either within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting" (p. 132). I tried to perceive continuities and discontinuities, and attempted to seek *core narratives* (Mishler, 1986) and central metaphors within the various field texts. As Bateson (2000) notes, metaphors "allow people to see patterns in their lives . . . Wherever there is a pattern there can be a framework for meaning" (p. 244). However, she also cautions us, stating we use "a wealth of metaphor . . . often without being aware of the assumptions they bring with them or using them consistently" (p. 244) and advocates that we "need ways to tell these stories that are interwoven and recursive, which escape the linearity of print to incite new metaphors" (p. 247). For this reason, metaphors which are present in participant or field text have been included, but not extended beyond what was evoked in the context of the conversation.

As Bateson (2000, p. 227) reminds us "No group this small can be used to prove any generalizations, but attention to them can provide take-off points for reflections." The standard research criteria of reliability, validity, and generalizability are not ones that we would hope for from narrative inquiry; the purposes of narrative inquiry lie in another direction. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 184) explain "the language and criteria for

the conduct of narrative research are under development in the research community." In the interim, they outline the possible criteria of apparancy and verisimilitude and transferability. In accordance with this, I have endeavoured to create a research text that engages the reader in a deep understanding of the experiences of the participants, one in which participants can readily find and recognize themselves, and one in which the reader can see new possibilities for other school settings.

Using a hermeneutically grounded, narrative inquiry methodology, what follows are two chapters which attempt to reveal in layers the experiences, perspectives, and lifeworlds of Ron and Charlotte. The decision to create separate chapters for each seemed a natural way of acknowledging the contextual awareness integral to a narrative inquiry approach, and as a way of laying side by each the common and disparate experiences of two educators who are unique characters in idiosyncratic teaching situations.

Chapter Four

Ron Nolan and Rosedale Outreach School

Ron Nolan and I met in the spring of 2003 during a conference about assessment. We became fast friends, both having the same kind of irreverent sense of humour and so I was pleased to have him join the research project. Through this chapter, the reader will find me *looking through the window* into Ron's classroom life, and the way he storied it in response to my presence. Ron more often showed me, rather than told me, about his world. Thus I have constructed a story through the language of activity for an educator that seems most at-ease in his practice when actively engaged with his students.

As with all narrative, the telling shapes the story through the language use, emphasis, and the tone of the narrator. Ellis (2004) notes that in doing contextual place study, "researchers (should) give great care to crafting an adequate representation of stories or cases prior to offering their own insights, interpretation, or theoretical analysis" (p. 91). Although I intended to follow this advice by keeping my explicit commentary occasional and encouraging the reader to enter the situation, I can see that my own perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of engaging in research is embedded in the creation of the various field texts and in the construction of this research text. In the interest of verisimilitude, I have often restrained myself from making explicit commentary linking the research text to the literature reviewed in chapter two of this work. I hope the reader will maintain his or her own awareness of the previously established theoretical constructs. In this chapter, a series of vignettes will serve to

illustrate the place, community, and lived experience of this particular educator's practice.

First Visit to Rosedale Outreach School

When I enter the building, I chuckle to myself. I have been given the wrong street address, but the description of the place is unmistakable. I soon spy the sign advertising the school section of this community recreation building. A teenage girl running the concession asks if I need help and politely informs me that the school is closed. When I tell her who I am here to see, she smiles and says, "Oh, he'll be here in his room." She says this as if it is a matter of course, even though it is a sunny and warm Saturday afternoon.

Ron sits behind his desk, simultaneously using the computer and rummaging absently through the piles of paper on his desk. We talk for a bit and reconnect. We haven't seen each other since meeting at an assessment conference last year and soon he is showing me some evaluation rubrics he had his psychology students design for an assignment on personal identity. We both exclaim over how well the student-generated criteria reflects Ron's objectives for the assignment and the criteria he has generated for himself. This begins a long and sometimes convoluted conversation as we start to get a feel for the differences and similarities in each other's outreach programs.

Ron's school has about 200 students enrolled, but he says I may only see half on site at any given time. The school is set up in one third of the building, with office space, computer lab, resource centre, and four spacious classrooms. Ron's room seats about 20

people along large, grouped tables and has a television/video player stand and two comfortable couches making a cozy corner on one side of the room. The school space is located along hallways in one section of the building, with sports recreation facilities and service and art clubs located in other sections. The central hub just inside the front door features a concession from which the school serves free hot lunches with support from the food bank each weekday, bordered by a large games room with pool tables, foosball, and air hockey tables and a stereo system. I ask about the keyboards and other band equipment tucked into a corner and Ron tells me that one of the teachers runs a music program. On the way back from a coffee run to the concession, Ron introduces me to the soft-spoken young lady who initially showed me in. She is a former student who smiles at us shyly.

As we sit and drink strong coffee, I hear a quiet knock at the street side window. I am not surprised. Ron had left instructions for me to do the same if I couldn't access the building by the front door, and he had made a point of having the computer monitor active before we made the trip to the staff room for coffee. The brightly lit computer is a signal to students who check the window that Ron is here during the weekend and other non-operational hours. The student waves and Ron gets up to open the back door.

A young man, smallish and slouchy, comes hesitantly in behind Ron. Something about the boy's body language reminds me that I am an intruder and Ron is careful to introduce me as his friend. Ron gets the boy some coffee, adding a liberal helping of hot chocolate to the cup from the shelf behind his desk. Reassured, the boy pulls up a chair right beside me at Ron's desk and proceeds to work on his science coursework. He is

perhaps half listening to our chat, mostly trying to figure out the maze of momentum, mass, and velocity. About 15 minutes after he has started, and I am engrossed in Ron's opinions about the political state of education in Alberta, I become aware of something extraordinary.

Ron says to the young man, "That question . . . it will need something to move to make it work." I wait, thinking perhaps that this is a subtle suggestion to the boy to get his pencil moving and stay on task. It is only when I look over that I realize that the entire time that Ron has been talking non-stop to me, he has also been reading the student's text upside down, observing his efforts to master the problem, and has decided to intervene in the least intrusive manner possible, so low-key that a fellow outreach teacher has not immediately recognized it as tutorial help. "The cars are moving towards each other," he speaks softly, explaining patiently, "and the momentum can be measured through using the formula in the first section." He turns to me and we continue with our dialogue, but I suspect he has caught the look of astonishment on my face. (reconstructed from field notes, April 28, 2004)

This visit begins an extraordinary fraternization with a fellow outreach teacher who is anything but a conventional educator. Early on, I wonder what we will find we have in common, but even during that first visit I feel a silent vibration, the core that you find in many educators: the ceaseless passion for educating and mentoring youth.

Introducing Ron Nolan

Ron Nolan (a pseudonym) is an imposing man with a build that suggests hours spent at the gym. He carries himself with a self-confidence borne of much life experience. I am sure that it is first impressions that intrigue students new to his class. Ron came to teaching relatively late in life. After an adolescence that saw Ron sometimes on the wrong side of the law, Ron completed an honours degree in psychology and was pursuing his master's degree in clinical psychology when a marriage break-up combined with other problems prematurely ended his academic career. The intervening years found him well employed in labour and trades jobs, but personally dissatisfied. Later, Ron went through substance abuse rehabilitation. He uses this key experience to counsel his students, some of who are involved in drug and alcohol use. When asked about sharing his high-risk activities as a young man with his students, Ron's reply is,

> I wanted to counsel kids . . . that were on the border, on the verge. I tell them too: 'I'm not proud, I did stupid things and I paid my price and please don't do the same things. Some of you, it's going to happen that you do, but if it does happen to you . . . life's a marathon, get up, keep going, there's a long way to go.' (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 22).

Part of Ron's approach with his students is derived from his experiences as a street-wise youth and several brushes with the law as an adolescent; these experiences grant him a tone of authority when counselling his students to stay on this side of the law.

In his 30s, Ron met and married a teacher and had children. With a thriving business as an arborist and landscape designer, Ron settled down to enjoy fatherhood and

marriage. At this time, Ron already had a keen interest in the local school system and was a perennial volunteer at his children's elementary school. However, a terrible five-story fall while tree-pruning left Ron with 48 broken bones. Even after a long period of intensive therapy, it became evident that Ron would not be able to do strenuous physical work for a living again. He still bears the legacy of this fall and lives with chronic and debilitating pain. When he had sufficiently recovered from his fall, Ron decided to get a degree in education and chose an elementary generalist route. His retelling of his decision to go back to school has an atmosphere of serendipity in it. His decision to pursue education studies came to him one day as he passed a small urban college in a nearby city centre. Four years later, during his last semester, he sought a practicum placement at the local outreach school where he volunteered and now calls home. Through his experiences, he found the arena to do what he truly desired to do: teach and reach students who were headed toward a troubling life path. However, Ron also has his own computer software and consulting company and is proud of his software that allows the school staff to track anecdotal records and manage a database of student records.

Through his retelling of himself, it is clear that Ron has a strong compassion for those less fortunate. He illustrates this well in anecdotes about his involvement both as a parent and as a coach of a youth hockey team. Recalling his years at a Christian based university, Ron notes that the campus had a very "right wing" and a very "left wing" contingency, and asserts "and I was the champion of the left!" (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 38).

In Ron's Room

The next time I visit, I am the one knocking at the window. I find myself grinning at this ritual of entry: I feel a bit like I am entering a secret clubhouse. The back door is opened and I step into the back passage to the inner sanctum of Ron's room. The tables have been reconfigured since my last visit to form two separate groupings; the two overstuffed grey plush couches make a 90-degree angle forming a third seating area. The rich smell of mocha coffee from a brewing pot on the back radiator fills the room and the sun streams in from the street-side windows. During conversation, I take a break and come back to find two towering and lanky boys parked at the table nearest Ron's desk. They are non-resident students participating in a local sports initiative and have come from a fair distance to write an exam. Ron is expecting them. He excuses himself to get them set up and I take the opportunity to browse the room.

The room is the same size and layout of a typical classroom, and yet it is rather disconcerting to see the periodic table of elements beside a biographical display of a notable psychologist, and offset by a lively series of posters about grammatical figures of speech. The idea of a high school generalist definitely comes through here. These three elements are framed by a few samples of student artwork and, somehow not incongruously, a poster entitled "101 ways to stay clean and sober."

In the far corner, close to the sink and television/video player cart, there is a book case filled with books, all kinds of books, from junior high pulp horror, true romance potboilers, and young adult classics, to beautifully illustrated editions of one of my favourite contemporary fantasy series. Each book has a coloured dot on the spine. Later, I

learn this is Ron's subtle way of grouping reading material for difficulty level in his efforts to improve basic literacy in his less skilled charges. While this room is clearly a classroom in the typical sense, it is also unusually welcoming and has a casual ambiance that invites students to relax. I see this time and time again through my visits here, and on more than one occasion it becomes clear that this room is a safety zone for students looking to escape difficult home lives. I find myself wondering what I could do to transform the west wing of my own outreach school, Storefront School, into a welcoming space such as this and make a mental note to investigate the possibilities with my staff.

When Ron returns, his irritation is clear. Due to a mix up, the boys' tests were unavailable. Ron is frustrated that the boys have come from out of town to write a test and had to be turned away and remains upset by this for the rest of the visit. I decide to keep to myself the observation that the school is typically closed on Saturday and that he really isn't under any obligation to make sure test materials are ready for Saturday writing. Somehow, I feel sure that this would be beside the point for Ron. For him, the fact that the boys were there and ready to write and have made a significant effort to be there, creates an obligation in principle for him as well. It is as if he and these kids have an unspoken pact: effort will be reciprocated. I am reminded of the troubled student working on science the last time I was there, looking for a quiet place away from home. Later in conversation, Ron expresses this clearly when he states, "If a student wants to whine to me about something, that's OK as long as they are working. Otherwise, I don't want to hear them whine until they are working." There is a lot of love behind Ron's

gruffness; a lot of tenderness behind his über-masculine persona (researcher journal, May 8, 2004).[1]

This journal entry reminds me of the traits of outreach schools that students valued (Housego, 1999). Certainly, this school has a teacher that goes beyond an obligatory caring, makes himself accessible, and tries to create a comfortable place of meeting. The students make a reciprocal effort and seem to be truly appreciative of the efforts that Ron extends.

The Place of Rosedale Outreach

Ron's school is set up differently from any other outreach school I have seen, suitable for a program that has an attendance component to some of its course offerings. Combined with service organizations, an employment office, and a sports facility, it is located in an established area of Rosedale, close to sports fields, churches, and hospital, and a few blocks away from a busy commercial district. Ellis (2004) notes several key features of places successful in transforming public spaces into community gathering areas. Some of these are: a mix of uses and users, a mix of ages, a welcoming appearance with lots of places to sit, accessible, social, the likelihood of seeing other people you know, good maintenance, effective security, and amenities such as food and telephones, as well as something interesting to look at or do. The following section describes

[1] Excerpts from my researcher journal take the form of reconstructed field notes accompanied by initial reflections.

Rosedale Outreach and illustrates how it epitomizes Ellis' definition of a space well adapted to *place-making*.

The layout of the facility honours a multi-purpose use design. Tucked into the general office area is an employment office staffed with employment counsellors. The school's computer lab and art room are adjacent to the local air cadets' office space. Several classrooms are located along a small hallway lined with lockers. As I wander, I note some interesting details. For example, while I had previously noted a television area in the games room, I hadn't noticed that it was donated by a local grocery store, as the sign indicates. This corner of the games room has a newer and very clean couch and also a high end component stereo system in a readily accessible cabinet. Large speakers mounted near the ceiling ensure a good sound. The area is given flair by a huge mural, painted by students, of a mountain, river and rising sun in bright primary colors. The television is flanked by theatre props shaped like towers of Camelot. There are potted silk fig trees everywhere. Across the room, a large wall poster shows a small child holding a crystal ball. The caption reads, simply, "Believe." The quality of the furnishings and the lack of locks on the entertainment system communicates that students here are trusted and valued, an important characteristic of outreach schools (Van Slyke, 2001).

Behind the television area is a baby playpen neatly packed full of toys, bordered by soda machines. A large sign hanging above some wall pegs with coats and other clothing announces "claim or will be taken to emergency clothing." Toward the hallways to the classrooms, a comprehensive, student-created display on bullying fills a bulletin

Board. A student message board links students to other community resources and programs.

This bulletin board gives a broader sense of the local community. Here, ads for a local arts program reside alongside posters warning about fetal alcohol syndrome, an advertisement for a junior gardener competition neighbours a "Transitions and Lifestyle Planning" brochure. The John Howard Society has posted changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Neighbourhood Youth Center and Arts and Recreation Department advertise their summer programming. Among these is a stern memo from the school principal reminding students that the bus service that picks them up right at their door "will wait no longer than 2 minutes!" for the students. A National Aboriginal Day celebration has a schedule of events prominently posted. Later, as I step through the front office, I note a beautifully framed graduating class photo is displayed for each of the last 4 years. This is an inclusive and multi-use space that has been designed to communicate the importance of young people and draw them into feeling a sense of belonging to the community

The staffroom of the facility illustrates how this school has departed from the culture of a traditional high school. At Rosedale, the staffroom is located immediately adjacent the main office reception area. Its windows open to the central student recreational room on three sides. Students can see if their teachers are present and wave or knock.

As a long-time classroom teacher, I note that I feel immediately comfortable at Rosedale Outreach. It is familiar and recognizable and evokes in me the same warm

feeling that I have when I remember the classrooms of my own elementary years, with their cozy reading corners and bright happiness all around. Perhaps this is the effect it has on students. It is interesting to me how a very different approach to the use of space can be used to create a learning place that is attractive and inviting (researcher journal, June 10, 2004).

In many ways, the space exhibits the generosity of place which Relph (1993) and others describe. By providing quality and well cared for furnishings and entertainment components, the school and community communicate how highly it values the students. The aspect of place ballet (Seamon, 1979), the rhythms and patterns of everyday interactions, is also evident in the following anecdote.

A Place of Cross-Collaboration

Tonight when I arrive at the school there is an event going on in the open area in the games room. There are about 20 teens and a serious pizza party going on. I recognize Cam[2], the youngster with whom I had an interesting conversation two Fridays ago, chumming and eating pizza. I engage in a conversation with Kim, one of the adults there and an organizer for a cross-agency leadership initiative. Emerging out of the local drug task force, this initiative comes from a partnership between AADAC, the local regional health authority, school authority and other community agencies. The group consists of student and teacher representatives from each secondary school, who went as a group for a leadership training retreat followed by each student going forward to design a project to

[2] All names of people at the research sites are pseudonyms in order to protect privacy.

make a 'positive impact' in their school. The pizza party is the final celebration concluding a presentation of the projects and their impact on local schools. When I proceed down the hall, I see the pizza party has spilled over into Ron's room, and a few young ladies are working on the couch and at the table, one assisted by Amy, the educational assistant. Jesse sits at another table with Jamie, both munching on pizza as they work (researcher journal, June 10, 2004).

This entry shows the interweaving and cross-collaboration of people and agencies, people who are sometimes students and teachers and other times collaborators in something greater in a partnership with community organizations. It is a good example of how individuals take up a place in their community through assuming a variety of social roles, and how the place of this outreach school facilitates this by blurring the boundaries between school activities and other activities such as socially conscious activism. Relph (1993, p. 35) observes that "we are linked to our places by patterns of activities that are so varied and subtle that they cannot all be identified." In this sense, the anecdote echoes the gemeinschaftlich ethos. Recall that Raywid (1993) in her discussion of alternative schools says that,

> members of a gemeinschaft community have emotional ties to one another and are linked by shared values and beliefs, recurring interaction with one another, mutual dependence and a shared commitment to a particular place. (p. 29)

The participants in this pizza party use this place to function in a variety of roles, but these roles are transcended by their personal identity and the social covenants they engage in as individuals.

As I read my researcher journal, I am reminded of the notion of the village well (Caragata, 1998) as it applies to outreach schools. Rosedale Outreach School is a part of a vibrant place where many functions are served by a central location. The common element here is that these are social functions that tend to the health of the local community. To place a school for students who have perhaps been largely unsuccessful in regular school here, in the midst of social support and activity, helps counteract the disenfranchisement and social stigma that might follow these students and cause them to drift towards a more marginal place in the local community. Placing them central in this recreation centre keeps students connected to the community as a whole.

Ron's classroom is a part of a place that students can engage in and experience a sense of belonging; it forms a venue for significant relationships to form. One of the main challenges I had when I began teaching in an outreach center was to try to understand the distinctly atypical pedagogical relationships that I observed all around me. Spending time in Ron's classroom helped define what I was seeing and experiencing in my own practice.

Serve as a Counsellor First, Teacher Second

Ron positions himself in his classroom, the school, his kids' lives, in a deliberate and premeditated way. One of the most noticeable traits was the way that he assumed an almost paternal role with an interest in his students as people experiencing life first and foremost, and students of an education system second. In one conversation, Ron describes aspects of his relationships with his students.

> Kids need to have consistency, that's another thing. I did an informal poll earlier in the year, and partly through last year, of about forty boys of whom only five of them had their fathers at home. And there were another 30 girls (for whom) it was the same thing. Out of 30 girls, two had their fathers at home. So out of seventy kids there, there were something like seven or eight, one in ten of their fathers were at home.
>
> So then maybe my earlier comment about you being a den mother is more like a den father, right? I ask.
>
> For sure. And I let them get away with some stuff that other teachers don't let them do, but I don't let them get away with not working. And I don't let them get away with quitting. I tell them, "If you want to be a cry-baby, go somewhere else, don't do it here. I'm here to show you that you can do it, and if you want to listen and do it, I'll be in your corner. If you work and you've got something to cry about, then come and see me. If you just got something to cry about for the sake of crying about it and you haven't done any work, then I'm not interested (reconstructed from transcript, June 19, 2004, pp. 9–10).

In this transcript segment, it is clear that Ron expects a level of reciprocity from his students, an expectation that will require students to commit both to Ron and buy into his expectations regarding their own worth. In the context of this quote, Ron's reference to work refers both to fulfilling one's obligations to schoolwork and attendance, but also to the work of attempting to solve problems. During my time at Rosedale, I noticed that Ron often intertwines real life skills with the mandated subject matter curriculum. For example, in his psychology class, he walked students through several models of positive and pro-active conflict resolution and solution-based discussion. By bringing current methods to his students to help them develop the coping skills they need for managing their own lives, he legitimizes the impact that conflict has on their lives. He communicates the idea that there are resources out in the world readily available to help students, and that while he will bring the resources to them, their obligation then is to do the hard work of changing their habits. This is one of the underlying ideas that is

impressed repeatedly upon students through Ron's interactions with them, an idea that I have best seen termed as the "reciprocal webs of moral obligation" that characterizes positive learning communities (Sergiovanni, 1999, p. 16).

Part of the underlying dialogue between Ron and his students is a dialogue of describing the world for each other. On many visits to Rosedale, I observed Ron having conversations with students about their risk-laden lifestyles. However, Ron notes, "These kids aren't looking for a preacher. What I tell them is that you better learn what it takes to satisfy society. You can go spend a lifetime at the food bank or at the Royal Bank" (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 21). He is realistic with his students: rather than making judgmental blanket statements about drug use, he tries to help students negotiate their place in society. He provides counsel that says,

> There's a difference between a kid in university getting caught with a joint or two versus somebody who has no place of residence, who sleeps on any couch he can find. That person gets treated differently and seen differently. You don't need to be a choirboy or a choirgirl, just don't be sliders. Show that you're dependable and reliable, and do the things that really mean something to society, and then the stuff you do on the periphery doesn't matter so much. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 23)

Part of this ongoing conversation appears to be intended to reconcile these students' lives with the rest of their society, and show them that there is a way that they can fit in without invalidating all of the familiar aspects of their lives. Ron accepts that lifestyle choices are not always completely within a student's direct control, but are influenced a great deal by family and peers, and much of his acceptance comes from his own life experience.

Ron is aware of the asset he has in his own life experiences. It is this ability to reflect on his own experience and observations and use these to assess the needs of his students that is one of the most noticeable traits of Ron's approach to serving his kids.

> One of our case workers, she has a degree in street rehabilitation. She's good, but she told me "this girl's just getting out of rehab". I said, "I went in and out of rehab three times. Keep busy, the key is to keep busy." The case worker said, "No, no, no, we want her not to do anything." I said, "No, you watch, she's going to want to be busy." She's been in my classroom every day and she's done more, had a higher output in the last week than she did, than anybody in that class had, in the previous 3 weeks, and she's here on Saturday. Why? It helps her deal with the heebee geebees. The case worker is saying, "No, let her relax." If she could relax at home, this wouldn't have happened in the first place! (transcript, June 19, 2004, pp. 11–12)

The previous transcripts illustrate Ron's gruff yet consistent caring for his students. A review of one set of weekly notes on his student advisor group also shows his orientation toward the importance of relating personally to his kids.

> Needs warning and a push . . . Still has little idea why he is here . . . Barely holding on . . . .Kev and Ron to talk. Going out with Chelsey and things are not going well with her mom . . . .quit work, said it was like being in jail . . . said had to be in hospital for the second or third day in a row. Has job at Wendy's now, problems sure to come up, making an effort to catch up in Psych and English. (Ron's anecdotal records from May 13–17, 2004)

These phrases in Ron's short hand, documenting the daily conversations with the students he monitors, reveals that he is privy to information about all aspects of his student's lives, and connects their personal lives to their educational pursuits in his consideration of their progress.

Ron likes to share his teaching stories and several of these demonstrate Ron's approach to working with students whose personal baggage prevents them from

participating in the learning community in a positive way. In one such anecdote, Ron tells of a Grade 12 boy who wanted to wear a jacket that said, "F… the Police" to a school awards ceremony. When Ron intervened, it sparked a conflict that the student took personally. When the principal became involved, the angry student accused Ron of betraying him.

> That's when I had a wrestling match with the kid, big one, can be very violent. But he's a kid that he has a reputation of being the toughest kid in the school and he wanted to go to awards night wearing a jacket that said, "F the Police," on the back. I said, "You can't wear that, it's inappropriate. You know more than anybody that I do not hold a particular affinity one way or another for the police, nor for anyone, they're no different than anyone else. This is not what we need the community to see what we stand for!" So the principal told him no, and he said (to me), "Rat, rat," . . . . "You're a rat." So I closed the door, I said, "Are you going to listen to me?" He said, "No, rat, you're a rat." So I put the deadbolt on the door, I said, "You want to wrestle?" So we wrestled for 10 minutes and I said, "There, you lost- sit down." He sat down, and we talked and I told him, "If you want to make a statement, make a statement that people are going listen to. Make a statement that will have an impact. F you has no impact; people blow it away. It's aggressive and it's threatening. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 10)

This segment of a conversation demonstrates some of the essential characteristics of outreach teachers as observed in Housego's (1999) study of outreach schools as "self-directedness, creative problem-solving and a "maverick sensibility" (p. 91, quotations in original), terms used to describe the sometimes unorthodox methods employed by outreach teachers to help students succeed. Certainly, wrestling a student to win the right to counsel and resolve conflict through dialogue would be considered out of bounds by most educators, and yet in this instance it provides Ron and this student with an opportunity to help rebuild fragile strands of trust and set in place some understandings in response to a teachable moment.

From these vignettes, it may seem that the student demographics at Rosedale Outreach School are stereotypical outreach: rough kids on the last stop before drop out. While I couldn't definitively classify the socioeconomic status of the students in Ron's classes, it was clear that these more challenging and at-risk students are the ones who are drawn to Ron, and he has chosen them as much as they chose him. This championing of the underdog is reminiscent of Ron's earlier title for himself, "champion of the left". Ron refers to this in a conversation about funding and student teacher ratios.

> These students are the hard core, are the most hard core kids. We're sending some kids out of here onto university and college. But still, the ones that I like are the worst of the worst, the ones that have had all the problems, but that have intelligence. I take the ones that are tough, that have had really (terrible) upbringings, who have been in jail, that have parents that are drug addicts, that have been abused. Those are the ones that I take. (transcripts, June 19, 2004, p. 15)

Ron's willingness to work with students who are profoundly lacking in social capital is a trait that works in concert with a tendency toward a reflective practice. One of the wonderful benefits of our conversations for me was to have the privilege of hearing another outreach teacher think aloud about his practice, and filter his experiences and decisions through the overarching image I carry of myself as an educator. Through this process I learned that one of the things that Ron was aware of was the way that gender may affect the way that students related to him.

> Just this year, for the first time, I've had really, really good success with girls, and wouldn't you know it… it's often the ones that grew up with an abuse situation. I'm very über-male, there's no question. And yet I've had a few huge successes with these girls, because I've sat there and read their papers, cried with them… I've had really good success this year for the first time with a lot of them. (reconstructed from transcript, June 19, 2004, pp. 13–15)

Many teachers express hesitation at working through intimate concerns with students, and it can be extra risky for a male teacher. For Ron, the possible benefit for the student outweighs the risks. This is yet another example of the way that Ron communicates his willingness to get involved and be committed to the progress of the whole student. Just as importantly, this anecdote demonstrates that Ron is willing to position himself in a way that renders him vulnerable. While I couldn't say if students recognize the complexity of this gesture, I am sure they respond. Perhaps one of the most powerful aspects of Ron's personal approach to his students is to grant them the sense that he trusts them on a personal level.

Trust Within Ron's Pedagogical Practice

Ron's life experience is a considerable asset in his role as a counsellor for his students. His storytelling about his practice reveals an affinity for students whose extraordinary emotional burdens reduce their chances of academic success, and it is his willingness to engage in personal storytelling and counselling that emerge as trademarks of his approach. What is interesting is the level of trust that is apparent in the relationships between Ron and his students. While younger students often share their confidences with a teacher with who they feel a bond, older students, and perhaps students who have not been successful or welcome in the regular school system, have learned to be not only more independent but wary. The power dynamic inherent in traditional secondary school settings reinforces this (Childress, 2000). However, Ron's relationship with his students lacks the guardedness and formality characteristic in high

school student/teacher relationships. Ron's students speak with him candidly about their drug and alcohol abuse issues, home lives, romantic relationships, fears, hopes and painful pasts. They seek him out as an advocate when dealing with the legal system and the child welfare system, and in return for their trust, Ron shares with them honest reflections about his own experiences, even those which could be detrimental to his reputation in the local community if used maliciously. It is this willingness to take risks, to trust his students with something important, to disclose his own painful experiences that set Ron apart as an educator, and that draws at-risk kids close to him.

Trust is noted as an important factor in the literature focusing on caring pedagogical relationships. Trust, in relation to the teaching act, is a kind of competence that invites students into carefully considered aspects of the relationships to construct a 'web of trust', and something that "should be at the heart of the school experience" (Ennis & McCauley, 2002, p. 152). These aspects could include mutual self-disclosure (Deiro, 1995), opportunities for alternative responses to curriculum, and designing 'second chance' contingencies that encourage risk-taking but provide a safety net, particularly in terms of assessment (Dempsey, 1994; Ennis & McCauley). Beattie (1999) writes of the importance of trusting relationships in the development of adolescents' voices and decisions; Witherell and Noddings (1991) note that caring relationships requires authentic dialogue, which is in turn dependent upon trust and the time needed for negotiated meanings of language. The politics of language and communication are two other areas Ron targets as a way of empowering his students.

To establish credibility with his students, Ron tends to speak with a rhythm, syntax and style that camouflage his level of education. He uses current street slang proficiently, and speaks in short phrases punctuated with gestures and facial expression that convey much of the meaning. It must be easy for his students to forget that he is also very much an accepted member of the society from which they feel excluded, simply because he does not sound like any teacher they have had before. But as colloquial as he is, and accepting of students' right to develop and own their own language, Ron is just as quick to insist on a language use that is inclusive and respectful of people's differences, and respectful of the institution of school. For example, in the classroom, Ron routinely ignores minor swearing, but responds with a distinct sharpness toward derogatory comments made between students or about others. This forms part of his strategy for teaching students social skills.

Just as Ron focuses on authentic communication in the school environment to establish rapport, he also attempts to teach his own students various ways of dealing with life situations through constructive dialogue. In the previous anecdote about the belligerent student who sat down for a talk after getting the proverbial chip knocked off his shoulder, we can see Ron's attempt to teach this student that he must express himself positively to be heard. As a teacher of English language arts and psychology, Ron is well positioned to use life situations in order to reach curricular outcomes, as the next two anecdotes reconstructed from the field notes demonstrate.

Quiet Evening at Night School

Tonight Ron seems a bit down. He is still waiting to hear whether he will be awarded the summer school teaching position, and hopes that the extra hours he offers on the weekend and the extracurricular interest he takes in his kids will be rewarded with the contract but he seems unsure. He perks up when he reaches one of his psychology students on the phone and convinces him to come in and complete an assignment that the student has recently missed in class. This student is in the middle of moving himself and his pregnant girlfriend to a new home, and he is exhausted and perhaps a bit overwhelmed, but he drives over in a borrowed truck at Ron's request.

The assignment is to role-play solution-focused counselling, one of the activities that Ron has been working on in class. After the role-play is done, Ron and the student each apply the rubric generated by Ron and the class to evaluate the student, coming up with a strong score that reflects the student's authentic engagement. The boy seems pleased and is animated as Ron and he debrief about possible applications to real life with his girlfriend and family. As I have been acting the third formal role of 'observer' in the activity, I am included in this conversation and am touched when the student thumps me gently on the shoulder as he says goodbye. I am once again struck by how warm and genuine Ron's students are, and how trusting of him. I am accorded that same warmth by virtue of Ron's endorsement (reconstructed field notes, June 3, 2004).

This brief section demonstrates a number of observations made earlier in this section. It shows Ron's overt concern for his students, his commitment to building and maintaining personal relationships, and a permeability in between school and home life

for Ron and his students. This field note also shows a deliberate attempt to differentiate assessment by building on a student's individual knowledge, skills and relevant situations. This can also be seen in the next section, during a day in which I attempted to record conversations and events during a class on a Friday morning at Rosedale Outreach School.

Providing Opportunities to Succeed

9:45 a.m.

When I enter, about seven kids are sitting around the large table closest to Ron's desk. As they get settled in, one girl comes late, apologizes sincerely and says, "Do you want to know why I am late?" Ron declines, but a few minutes later she blurts out again. "So, do you want to know why I'm late? My uncle died yesterday," she says starkly.

"What do you want to do?" Ron asks.

"What do you mean?" she asks after a careful pause.

"Do you want to talk, you know, tell us how you feel? Do you want to go home? Do you want to talk to us?" Ron asks gently. His voice is very even and quiet. I read no sense of direction here.

"I'll just stay and work," she says, and yet somehow she seems relieved. She has been doing a bit of shifting before this but she seems to settle into her chair and let go of some of the stiffness in her shoulders. The talk resumes as Ron goes over each of the students' assignment record and attendance record. I think the topic is closed. A while later, during some small group instruction about their upcoming paper that is due, Ron

addresses the bereaved girl. She has been sitting opposite him, doodling a bit, listening, participating a bit, working. He says suddenly, "So were you close to your uncle?" She continues to doodle, head down and does not answer. Ron seamlessly continues conversing with other students about the paper parameters (reconstructed from field notes, May 21, 2004).

I learn from listening to this section of the class that if a student misses an evaluated activity, Ron offers almost continual opportunities to do make up assignments. Ron liberally sprinkles compliments over each student as he goes over their marks, particularly about good attendance. But no student is left without some kind of positive acknowledgement. There is a sense of hope in this briefing: I do not hear anybody groaning about their grade, only negotiating for the opportunity to make up assignments and increase success.

10:15 a.m.

The door opens with a bang and a boy with a very close haircut shuffles in. Ron calls loudly, "Hey, good to see you buddy! What's up with your hair? Gardener cut it? Looks like mine!" This is funny because Ron has no hair at all, just shiny scalp. The kids smirk and giggle. Aaron comes in and sets himself down heavily, but he is smiling and pulls his chair around so he can sit right beside Ron. When his mark review comes I learn that there is no mark for the recent poster assignment. Aaron allows as perhaps he didn't start it yet.

Toward the end of the evaluation review, Ron goes over the marks of the bereaved niece. He notes that she has a reasonable average but that she got a mark of zero for missing the Jeopardy-style concept review the previous class. She asks if there is some way she can make up the grade, and Ron gives her an assignment: to write one page about how she is experiencing her uncle's death. However, she has to hand it in today (reconstructed from field notes, May 21, 2004).

Later, when Ron allows me to read this work, it is clear that this young lady has a rich understanding of grief, change, family relationships, and some profound observations about death and how it changes survivors. In effect, he has created an assessment tool for the psychology course content based on *this moment* when these concepts have relevance for *this student*.

10:40 a.m.

The students have scattered around the room to work on collages that deal with identity and future planning. One student who is complete is excused to work on a social studies project he has due today; a few others join me in looking over the completed work spread out on the table. The students have clearly put a great deal of reflection into the concepts in their expression, and have spared no effort to make it visually engaging, even compelling. Aaron remembers that he really has started his poster but he just had to find it. When he locates it he waits proudly for Ron's acknowledgment. One student asks politely to go for a smoke break and is just as polite when Ron responds that class is almost over and it would be preferable if he could wait until break.

As the students work, I am aware that they each wait to be offered before helping themselves to the cookies I have spread across the table, and they seem to me to be particularly courteous. This is not to say they are restricted: profanity does not provoke any covering response; they move and use the room comfortably and informally. It is just that I am aware of a distinct lack of posturing, belligerent body language or tension in their interactions with Ron and each other. These kids are comfortable with their environment and with their role within it. They smile easily, wait to be told to take a cookie, say please, meet my eyes, act gracious in my presence, and yet speak freely about their struggles with their drug and alcohol habits. They talk confidently, speak easily and include their teacher and myself in casual talk.

Towards the latter portion of the class, another student bursts in. Students have been arriving throughout the early portion of the class, never defensive but courteous and apologetic, and they quickly get productive. This last late student is just a bit different. Instead of coming in quietly, he strides in calling out, "Hey Ron! I am sick but I came to school!" There is a flurry of conversation as it becomes clear that this young man has recently put an expensive and impressive stereo system in his truck, which he has conveniently parked just outside the window so that we can all see it from the window. He has a much harder time settling in to work, and Ron confides in me later in the day that he has done a great deal of counselling work over the last year with this boy, but a recent inheritance has eaten away at some of this progress; the boy is spending foolishly and partying hard. His 'illness' today is actually a hangover. Later in the class, while looking at the young man's identity/life story poster, I can see that he has had a very

difficult childhood punctuated by frequent and early involvement with the law. Ron's entry into this young man's world is represented on his autobiographical timeline with the entry "met Ron, he saved my life" (reconstructed from field notes, May 21, 2004).

These reconstructed field notes reflect many instances within a typical classroom day when Ron demonstrates his caring in ways that demonstrate an acute awareness and willingness to adapt to students' needs. As in Deiro's study (1995), Ron's roles as a teacher are many and diffused: he is at once a counsellor, teacher, and coach. He understands that students may come to school emotionally and socially depleted and works hard to help these students develop positive coping mechanisms and increase self-awareness. Students' sense of control over the environment and their own conduct there is noted to be a factor in students' perceptions that they are cared for or that they are valued in the learning environment (Beattie, 1999; Conrath, 2001; Deiro, 1995; Housego, 1999; Wentzel, 1997). Ron allows his students relatively great latitude in their conduct, opting to let the small stuff slide in favour of pursuing the greater goals, and allowing students to find their own way to participate rather than dictate how they should. Ron uses humour with one student, and seems just as concerned with conversation related to personal, out of school concerns, as he is with the curricular concerns at hand. Dempsey (1994, p. 95) points out that caring teachers listen to things that students wish to speak about, not only those things about school, and that "good teachers know children and know the circumstances from which those children come to school". Ron seems to intuitively and consciously nurture the development and maintenance of relationships, and attend carefully to the context and shared experiences that are the foundation.

Experiencing Time in a Diffusion of Roles

During my time at Rosedale Outreach, Ron was almost continually multi-tasking, except when he was speaking with a student. During that time, he was noticeably still and focused. Other times, he would be organizing materials, sorting through desk debris, composing an email, fixing the printer and talking with me all at the same time. This appeared to be his typical mode of operating, so it came as no surprise to me that when I asked him about time, he composed a rough circle graph for me at the same time as marking a multiple choice exam.

> I'm pretty flexible. I bring the kids I pick up in at about 8:20am, and I am here until after four most days, but sometimes stay until six or seven to get things done. I am here until after nine pm on the days I teach night school. I do probably 50 to 55 hours a week in school, not counting the time I spend in kid's houses just talking. I also spend about 10 hours a week extra, 70% of that at the gym working out with some of the guys and 30% doing 'drive counselling' and taking kids to the grocery store. (transcript, June 19, 2004)

When I asked about the phrase "drive counselling," Ron explained that he often takes kids along with him on errands to the city, using the travel time to have good talks. Another student who is about to be a father was taken grocery shopping so that Ron could teach him how to compare prices and read labels to get the best nutrition for his dollar. This anecdote led Ron into a segue about a upcoming court appearance he has to make time to attend, to clear up a misunderstanding that has occurred between himself and the probation officer of one of his students. He plans to take along a few of his other students to see a courtroom in action. Ron could only estimate on paper how he portions out his time: 80% with students, and of that about 40% in class instruction and 40% in one on

one instruction situations, the other 20% spent on the phone with them or just in conversation. Of the other 20% of his total time devoted to his work, he figured that he spent 10% preparing and 10% marking. For Ron, teaching seems to be a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week proposition. He routinely put in long weekend afternoons at the school, helping students get caught up, and remembers one time staying up with a student at the student's home until two in the morning, helping him through a personal conflict and completing coursework at the same time. This portrait of Ron's commitment certainly belies the common assumption that a school teacher's work day ends when the students leave at 3:00 p.m., and we had more than one laugh about the absurdity of this myth.

Rosedale as a Gemeinschaftlich Community

The common element in all of these snapshots of Ron and his students' lives at Rosedale is a sense of mutual respect and obligation that suggests both a carefully attended to and crafted communal space, and the organic and unscripted development of a special place and group within the school. There is a noticeable difference in the quality of the atmosphere, rhythm of daily life and the quality of relationships at Rosedale, and in Ron's classroom, that reflect the notions of the gemeinschaft-based community.

Recall that the gemeinschaftlich relationship is multi-faceted, based on social covenants born of social and moral obligations, based on an ethic of caring rather than transactional, and characterized by reciprocity, loyalty and a recognition of individual's identity (Orr, 1995; Raywid, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1999). These characteristics are evident in the daily routine of Ron's interactions with his students, and in their responses to his

ministrations. What is also evident is that these relationships rely on a common, mutually developed and co-negotiated meeting place that has evolved to serve the needs of the greater learning institution even as it provides a space for students to restyle for their own uses, comfort and even refuge.

A Learning Community Reconstructed

The staff at Rosedale is small, with six teachers. This particular year, Ron teaches English 10, Science 20 and 30, Psychology 20 and Physical Education, in addition to his remedial literacy program. The generalist approach is also reflected in the other teachers' assignments, where Physics 30 and Community Health within an assignment of four distinct subject areas do not seem out of place. The timetable accounts for teenagers' lifestyles and learning styles, with the heaviest academic subjects classes scheduled for the middle of the day, the early morning and late afternoon block scheduled for options. As well as the six professional staff, including one administrator, there are an equal number of educational assistants assigned to various aspects of the program.

In comparison, the staff and assignment distribution at my own outreach school is similar but we serve a Grade 7 to 12 population. Our program is not based on direct teacher instruction, and so attendance is not mandatory. However, we offer a supervised study hall each morning and some teachers offer afternoon and evening subject seminars to both junior and senior high students. Teachers serve as tutors and monitor student progress, with educational assistants providing extra support, both remedial tutoring and personal support to students who need it.

During the time of this study, Rosedale Outreach was in its third year of a new program and a new identity within the district. For its first four years of operation, Rosedale operated as a typical outreach school, with students completing independent units of study, often at home, and accessing teacher tutorial help and text resource while at the school. Like all outreach schools, Rosedale's provincial funding was dependent on rates of course completion rather than attendance, and like many outreach schools, funding rates were substantially lower than those of the local high school. In an area that prides itself on having one of the highest high school completion rates in the province, the school district board was anxious to accept the forward thinking principal's proposal to redesign the approach of the school. With that decision, came a commitment of a new facility and well-supported capital expenses.

With the new approach, came the need for a new environment. Relocating the school within an existing recreation and community facility gave the school staff and students increasing access to a host of other services. Ron explains,

> We have caseworkers inside the building, family liaison workers, community health people, a government supported employment program called Finding and Maintaining Employment (FAME), as well as the food bank, Cadets and the Boys' and Girls' Club. We have full access to all of them… Economically, it became a viable model and everyone was able to get together. (transcript, May 8, 2004, pp. 10–11)

In addition to providing more services to students, this school/ community service collaboration also creates an interesting professional community. Individuals from different vocations that support youth are able to collaborate and create cross-agency dialogue through their daily interaction. Recall the multi-agency drug awareness pizza

party celebration I joined during one of my evening visits, and how the host, Kim, welcomed me and my questions, eager to share his excitement and pride. Not only is this exchange of resources a benefit for adults, but it can be directly seen to benefit students, for example through the increased access that Ron has for guest instructors, such as the local psychotherapist he asked to come in to his class to speak on the technique of hypnotism. Teaching staff members also support others' programs through collaborative instruction in areas such as CPR clinics or co-hosting sports tournaments.

Another aspect of the redesign of the school came with a distinct shift in teaching philosophy. The school attempted to alleviate funding concerns by returning to an attendance based model, with more 'student-teacher face time' but one that would see students still work on independent or individualized programs. When students complained about attendance expectations being too much like the traditional schools they had left, Ron remembers his curt response,

> Well first of all, you're welcome to leave and secondly traditional schools don't go to your homes, don't call your homes, they don't play hockey with you and work out with you. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 2)

Ron's response qualifies the essential difference between the services that Rosedale offered and the local composite high school. The notion of porosity between home and school (Holloway & Valentine, 2000) is emphasized here in both the experience for the student, but also for Ron's experience as well, who was accessible to students at his home phone number and during evening and weekend hours. In the restructuring of the program, teachers were encouraged to get involved with students in their daily lives, and

advisory groups were assigned to each teacher, who would monitor their overall program and progress, as well as act as a support person for those students. As Ron explains,

> The principal set up the advisory groups with the intention that a teacher would show the student that they have more than a passing interest in them academically, they're interested in their lives personally. I spend a lot of time on it. I talk to each of these kids at home at least once a week. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 5)

Ron's advisory group of 30 students is a responsibility in addition to his full time teaching load, but one that he welcomes. However, while it is clear from his anecdotal record keeping that Ron has embraced the philosophy behind the advisory groups, it is also clear from his comments that some of the staff did not, and this has created some concern for Ron.

> I spend quite a bit of time on this, but philosophically some of the teachers believe in it and some don't… What has happened is that some of the teachers have passed this job on to their aides, and at least somebody is doing it, but all you have done really is you have kids thinking that the aide is their teacher and they aren't… All this does is put another barrier between kids and their teachers, and I am dead against another layer of bureaucracy in there. (transcript, May 8, 2004, pp. 5,6)

The staff documents their anecdotal records on a database accessible to all teachers and to the principal, who reviews the records. Each Monday morning, staff meet together to discuss concerns with their charges, compare information and decide on intervention; whether the principal has to send the student an *inactive letter*, saying that the student is about to be put on the inactive list or whether another intervention can be developed. These meetings are highly valued by Ron, who suggested that there still is not enough cross-referencing of information between staff, but that it is "getting there." Engaging in a role redefinition would be challenging for many teachers, and while Ron came newly to

teaching midlife during the apex of this school's effort to restructure, many of the staff had previously spent years in the classroom. It is not surprising that staff would be at various points along the continuum of implementation. Ron's awareness and acceptance of this can be seen in his assessment of his colleagues.

> Even though we are at the end of term, this week and last have been extremely busy for me, but a lot of teachers toned it down a week or more ago. Out of six teachers, half of them have just… given up is the wrong term because they are superb teachers, but they say, "OK, that's it, kid." They have different philosophies from me is all. And I don't disagree with them. One's a hard-core cynic, and that is not going to change, but he is also a great teacher. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 31)

One of the characteristics of my own teaching staff at Storefront School was that we all had a niche to fill within the collective of the staff and with students and parents. Much in the way family members will take on roles to serve the family, I experienced a process of carving a role for myself within my school community, and I had to accept the fact that others had also redefined themselves, too. It was startling for me to realize that front end support staff, educational assistants, and youth workers all had an equal voice in the shaping of educational policies and programs that I had previously viewed as the teachers' domain. Over time, the wisdom of this became more than apparent, as the discussion was made richer through their perspectives. The process of self-identification took me much longer in the outreach school than in other school changes that I had made, simply because, as a frontier-space in the educational landscape, there were so few traditions and common understandings to on which to rely. I see that aspects of the teaching persona that Ron exhibits are likely characteristic of his role on staff, and the philosophy that is required by that role. Ron has a respectful regard for his

colleagues, and accepts that each has his or her own strength, but is aware that a primary facet of his role is to drag high-risk students over the finish line when necessary.

> These kids need to recognize you can't keep letting it slide, you can't get to it next week, next week is here and it's now. And they are in here at night with me, and I am in their houses and they get it done. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 31)

For Ron, his persona demands that he push right to the end, an exhausting stance at a time of year when exhaustion is the order of the day, but a stance that defines him consistently with who he strives to be in the classroom.

During the restructuring of Rosedale Outreach, alternate assessment was another area that the staff addressed, in addition to a new facility and a reconsideration of the role of the teacher. Creating authentic assessment practices in the classroom was one of the school board's newest initiatives during this time, and this gave Ron and his colleagues the encouragement to practice innovative assessment. Ron explains, "We allow the kids to express what they have learned in a number of different ways that traditional schools still don't" (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 8). Students and teachers at Rosedale engaged in a wide variety of assessment activities, including performance assessments, role-playing and oral examinations, and on several occasions these were facilitated collaboratively between two teachers or teachers and educational assistants. Ron is proud of the work that his students do, and proud of the fact that as his board's representative in a grass-roots assessment consortium, he has been instrumental in bringing many newly accepted assessment practices into the school and district.

During my time at Rosedale, I noticed that relationships between staff were very casual and intimate. Staff came and went in the various classrooms without knocking or

invitation and appeared to be in ongoing dialogue, with conversations being 'picked up' from an earlier time in the recent past without any noticeable restatement. I rarely saw staff gather in the staff room, but there were many hallway and classroom conversations that were extended and engrossing. Once Ron had introduced me to the other staff members, many of them engaged and absorbed me into the conversation as if I had been there all along. As a member of an outreach teaching staff, I have often reflected on how familiar relationships often are with staff in outreach schools simply because there is less staff, the site is physically smaller, time is more flexible and the atmosphere is considerably less formal, allowing staff to develop rapport more readily. With some of the organizational barriers lowered, new opportunities develop for dialogue regarding student progress and best teaching practices, however, there are constraints that surface when attempting to teach in a small staff.

A Learning Community Reconsidered

"We don't teach in a bubble!" was a statement made with no small degree of exasperation when Ron was relating an anecdote about another staff who challenged him on one of his actions. The metaphor of a bubble, an illusion of protective separation, is reminiscent of the metaphor that my own staff and I used to describe working in our open layout outreach school. We would say we are 'living in a fishbowl', because everyone could hear and see all interactions. For a teacher like me, used to closing her classroom door and settling in for some private time with students, this took some acclimatization. In an outreach school, there is this sensation that you are in an exaggeratedly public

sphere, because you are afforded none of the privacy of anonymity. Perhaps that was why at Rosedale, staff chose to converse in the hallways, rather than in the staffroom, with its full-surround windows. As a learning community, transparency can have immeasurable benefits, through the kinds of organic and collaborative dialogue aforementioned, but it can also have negative by-products. Ron reported concerns that, on occasions when there were differences of opinions between two staff members, sometimes other staff and even students became aware of the conflict.

Ron would be the first to acknowledge that there is a process of enculturation that is necessary to fit into a learning community. He notes that even while he is teaching his own students about socialization,

> I make mistakes here, and not a lot of them, but I tend to tell staff what I think… I spend two percent of my time answering to the principal for transgressions, but last year it was 7%, and the year before that it was 12%, so it's taken about 3 years for me to recognize when and what I can and can't say. (reconstructed from transcript, June 19, 2004, pp. 27–29)

Ron is clearly aware that he is new to the profession and learning the hidden codes and mores inherent in any social group. In a small school, many of these aspects can be intensified because of the increased level of interaction, and because in the larger scheme, Ron is new to the school. Staff members who are new to a school often have a heightened awareness of trying to figure out the expectations of the 'tribe' (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Ron notes that previously he had ongoing conflict with a particular female staff member who formally complained that she felt he was too aggressive. For Ron, this revelation was a source of great discomfort, and he opened himself to another female staff member for assistance.

> A good day I spent writing her a (reference letter) and in it I admitted that she helped me in dealing with people. She was good in helping me with personal space with women and it worked out well. I am hoping I can work again with her next year. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 28)

Ron's awareness of the awkwardness he sometimes encounters with colleagues is contrasted by his confidence in social situations with students that might make other educators uncertain.

When I consider Ron's experience in the context of my own discovery of how to be a teacher in an outreach school, I remember having a heightened awareness that the stories in an outreach school situation are different from the familiar school story, and that it was an engaging challenge to gather the pieces to construct a sense of the whole place. Outreach schools are often populated by individuals whose beliefs about schooling are in direct conflict with mainstream schooling approaches; this is infused in the culture of some outreach schools. These are not educators that value conformity for its own sake, and so the story of outreach is a story of alternatives. This idea was reflected in Ron's occasional friction with other staff members when trying to validate educational decisions he had made. For example, when talking about co-organizing a sports tournament with another staff member, Ron recalls how he felt when the other teacher interfered in his set up of the tournament. This involved inviting other same-age group physical education classes rather than representative sport teams, so as to give his students, who do not have the advantage of an after school sports program, a fair chance to win.

> I had it set up round robin format and everything, so we could have possibly won, however taking together their two teams, they whomped us because he had

> changed it to a points basis. And at the end, the other teacher said, 'We did really well, hey?' and I'm thinking, 'Yeah, but you know what? Our guys could have won that trophy.' We had an opportunity to bring a bunch of kids, who have never won, to the trophy. But I didn't even tell him how mad I was. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 15)

Ron's frustration is apparent in this conflict and yet with a staff of just six teachers, he feels collaboration is essential simply to reduce workload. Sergiovanni (1994, p. 149) notes that "this ambivalence between the value for individualism and the need for community accounts for our discomfort whenever someone suggests that teaching practice become more collective."

Another story demonstrates just how adamant Ron is in his decision making about what is best for his students. Ron invested huge amounts of time and effort on one student whose lack of literacy skills and poor motivation hindered his progress. Taking the student under his wing, Ron picked up the student for early morning reading lessons every day for most of the last year, and coached him on programming and course completion so that he would have just enough course credit requirements to graduate. Ron sat with the student and his family at the graduation ceremony earlier in the spring. However, toward the end of the term, the student started to slack off on his courses, and was in danger of failing and forfeiting credits needed for graduation. As the school year was winding down, Ron reflected on the sacrifices he had made to ensure that this student had a chance to graduate, and anticipated that he might be asked to round the student's grade up to passing for high school completion requirements.

> It's a tough love thing. I'm not going to give it to him, or what am I teaching the kid? The principal is going to be mad at me, because he is the principal's favourite, and the kid doesn't know, but he will find out Monday… I like the

> principal, he is a good guy, so he'll ask me to bend and I'll bend and meet the kid in here this weekend, and I will come in at night again. I'll be here till midnight on the last day if the kid wants, but if he doesn't come in and do the coursework with me, I'm not passing him… All he needs is the one hundred credits, but he needs every one. I've had this very finely planned for this kid. I don't care what they say. I teach the way I teach and they know that. (reconstructed from transcript, June 19, 2004, pp. 6–8)

Considering earlier conversations, it is clear that Ron wants his students to feel that they have earned their success and will go to great lengths to defend that position. For example, in previous years, students who had at least eighty credits completed could participate in the spring graduation celebration. Ron and another colleague lobbied to have that changed so that only students who were sure to complete the entire requirements could participate in the ceremony.

> In most high schools in Alberta, if you have eighty credits you can walk, but I teach my kids, 'don't you dare expect me to be there and cheering you on when you've hit a double and you're acting like you hit a home run. However, if you go all the way, I'll see you there.' If you let them walk, all you've shown them is that you can bear the fruit of your labour without going through the labour and I think that is garbage. So, this is the first year that we have changed. (transcript, May 8, 2004, pp. 25, 26)

In each of these transcript segments can be seen the contextual reflection of a school culture that is developing. Deal and Peterson (1999) note that one very important aspect of a culture's development is the dialogue that members engage in as a way of articulating *what is important, here* and then creating rituals that re-affirm this dialogue. Throughout these interactions are an "underground flow of feelings and folkways" (Deal & Peterson, p. 3) that emerge as the conscious expression of how the organization defines a standard of excellence. As culture is enduring but always dynamic, this dialogue is must be central and ongoing. Ron's anecdotes demonstrate on just how many levels he is

engaging in dialogue, problem-solving and the consolidation of values, beliefs and assumptions. Even those interactions that leave Ron feeling frustrated or uncomfortable are still an integral part of the continued efforts of staff to consolidate its recent restructuring experiences. When asked if teaching was what he had expected as a profession, the only area that Ron felt any sense of disappointment was some of the quality of his interaction with staff.

> I didn't envision some of the arguments with some of the teachers; I naively assumed that there would be more congeniality, that there would be more respect for what I have… Sometimes some staff members are not so tactful, and I can be lacking in tact, too but it's because I intentionally want to present that, and then I will take my chances…There is some badgering and petty stuff, but now that I have a continuous contract it's a lot easier to ignore. (transcript, June 18, 2004, pp. 18–20)

Ron's insistence that students earn their successes legitimately is a recurring theme that resurfaces often in his retelling of his experiences, and if occasionally he feels that his approach is under scrutiny, he is also just as confident that he is highly regarded for his commitment to his students. Respect and regard are very important for most teachers, and Ron values these things highly. As someone whose own business ventures have been more lucrative than teaching, Ron considers personal satisfaction and community regard as among the real rewards of teaching.

On Being Part of a Community of Practice

One of the conversations that I seem to have had many times during my own three years as an outreach educator was the conversation about how the profession does not understand nor particularly respect teachers who work in alternative schools such as

outreach schools. I have felt this way myself on many occasions when I spoke about my teaching assignment to others and received a blank look, with perhaps a bit of smugness. However, the restructuring of Rosedale Outreach was locally recognized to such an extent that it appeared to change the way that mainstream educators viewed their colleagues.

> Teachers who leave Rosedale get hired easily all over the district. When I go around the district and do presentations on our assessment practices, people treat me very respectfully. I've had dozens of teachers say to me, 'You know, I really admire how you teach, that you're able to accept these kinds of (assessment) changes or go to work in this kind of environment effectively, and you're not just simply putting in time.' There is a surprising amount of regard for this school, because not that long ago the rest of the district didn't think that teachers here could teach worth anything. You have to, but more than a few came running out of here because they couldn't handle it, which is kind of funny. (reconstructed from transcript, June 19, 2004, pp. 20–22)

Ron's work as an educator does not stop when he is not serving the needs of his students. Ron serves formally as a professional development resource person for his district. He also has taught summer school through the outreach school in past years, although recent changes to the summer school hiring practices indicate that he may not teach summer school in the upcoming session. It annoys him that he may be overlooked when he feels he has earned the right to teach the program. While he has enjoyed attending assessment consortium meetings and his public speaking engagements, he also experiences some frustration with the time and energy that is required, and feels that perhaps his contributions are not as valued as he would expect.

Ron mentions several times that he presents on a lot of school days, at one point suggesting that at times he is gone as much as one out of every six school days, and that

he would like to reduce the amount of time he is out of the classroom. Ron is caught between others' desire for him to deliver presentations on his assessment practices and his literacy initiatives, and his own desire to be with his students. Appalled by how fickle the assessment consortium is and how meagre the remuneration is for speaking, he says,

> I will no longer take time away from my classroom for these assessment activities, because I am not here to push anyone's agenda. Even if I have had people come and say they are using oral exams now as a result of spending the morning with me, that's really good, but that is not what I want. I don't get my jollies thinking I am going to turn the world around by turning a bunch of teachers around. I get them because I like to work with these kids who are going to end up in jail. Then I can help them. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 17)

> The school board wants me to put together a literacy program for at-risk youth, well why? Why would I add another 10 or 20 hours to my 80 hour work week, when they know I want this summer school job and they might not let me do it? I'm good at what I do, I'm prepared, I'm passionate, and if they want to take that for granted, well good luck in replacing that. If I wanted to, I could walk out tomorrow, and I'll make more money at my software business. But I like this stuff; I like the assessment because I like the idea that we have been marking kids wrong, wrong, wrong! (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 36)

Both these statements demonstrate that Ron feels the need to balance his obligation to the community of educators with his commitment to the community he has created in his own classroom, and these two obligations sometimes pull him in opposite directions. His concern about having enough time to fulfill all these obligations is implied in many statements. Ron reveals that he feels his board does not recognize his extraordinary commitment to his students, yet at the same time, Ron is pleased that his achievements are being recognized so early in his career. This apparent contradiction, between feeling well regarded and feeling not quite supported is something that Ron returns to time again throughout his conversations with me.

The Outreach School and the Local Community

Another tension emerges as Ron explains his perceptions of the support that the school receives through the board and the local community. On one hand he is very proud of the program and often acts as an advocate with community members, taking it upon himself to 'sell' the importance of the program by giving impromptu tours and taking advantage of opportunities to network with program supporters. What is interesting is the regularity with which Ron feels the need to justify the existence of the program and his own position. I have not often heard mainstream classroom teachers spend a lot of time justifying their own jobs.

> I also make the point when people come in here of doing the tour. There is a washer and dryer here, we feed lunch everyday from the food bank, and the community supports that. And I thank them. You know we get a lot of older people here using the walking track and I thank them and I tell them, 'Well, you know this is your money' and it is fairly easy to win over some of them because if you look at the arguments from a purely economic standpoint, it costs less to educate these kids so that they will maybe get a job, pay taxes, and avoid jail and welfare. These people need to see that no matter what your political orientation is, supporting these people is the right thing to do. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 13)

By assuming situational leadership in this way, Ron becomes an icon of his world, a "living logo" (Deal & Peterson, 1999), whose style of advocacy is symbolic of the school itself. I am familiar with this stance. The administration at my outreach school spends a considerable amount of time creating alliances with other agencies in hopes of gathering cooperation, if not funding, for extension programs that are not easily covered through credit equivalent funding, but essential to the school.

> The mayor was here for a photo a few weeks ago for the release of the drug task force pamphlet and I made a point of going over there and thanking him and the city for everything they have done for these kids. Sometimes it gets through to people and sometimes it doesn't. It could be your kids, it could be my kids. We are not talking about genetics here. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 14)

On one hand, Ron is grateful for the support that the school receives and is anxious to see the community value the school program the way that he does. His comments about the town clearly communicate someone who does not quite feel that he belongs in this community, but is committed to the health of the community, and would like to reconcile that contradiction.

> I don't like living here. This can be a hard core, right-wing, mean-spirited town. Having said that, I am getting softer on my position. This school is the result of the community, it's their money and I'm in a beautiful school doing the job of my life because this facility exists for the kids of this community. There is a skateboard park now that the community built themselves, so I shouldn't say I dislike it. I dislike it considerably less than I did two years ago, and I am seeing a lot more social consciousness here now. No matter how I want to look at it, this school is them. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 13)

Ron speaks with some hostility toward the local community, calling it 'redneck'. At the same time, he also feels that the community views the program and the students negatively, and he worries about this a fair bit. When asked directly about how community members feel about program he seemed adamant.

> The feedback I get is that there are longstanding negative feelings towards it, because it has been around for eight years. There is a lot of negativity towards the kids; they say 'Little bastards, they're troublemakers' and blah blah. And it is true, a lot of them are, but the problem is that you get these people passing judgments on children that will stay with a lot of these kids for the rest of their lives. We are not talking qualified psychologists; we are talking Martha and Henry, to refer to Ralph Klein's constituents. (transcript, May 8, 2004, p. 14)

This tension recalls Ron's retelling of himself during his university days as the *champion of the left*, and a strong image of Ron as a person who feels a compassion for students who are struggling to 'make good' for themselves in the world. Part of this stance may come from Ron's own sense of himself as someone who is newly accepted into a professional community. Perhaps he identifies with his students and their lives because he has a similarly troubled background, and he wishes to prevent them from making the same unwise choices. The level of expectation that Ron puts upon himself reveals a man driven by his need to fulfill a responsibility to society.

> Like I said long ago, I'm not one of those people who would accept saving one person. I would just stay home. I told the kids, Mother Theresa said, 'I did it one child at a time, and then another', and I can agree with that. I can work with one at a time. But if I failed, if there was failure after failure, then I wouldn't do it. I am forty five years old and life is too short. (transcript, June 19, 2004, p. 18)

Leaving Rosedale Outreach School

It was difficult for me to leave Rosedale Outreach at the end of the spring term. It was a place that I would have liked to teach in, and I admired how the staff had taken the best of the typical outreach philosophy and combined it with the shared time and place of the traditional school to create a hybrid learning community that was all about people learning, rather than just curriculum. When I dropped by near Christmas with some baking, there were new faces to meet, but the atmosphere was the same as I had remembered it.

December, 2004

When I walk in through the community center lobby, there is an elderly lady waiting for a ride, with a mitt-full of Christmas baking. Since I am carrying my own, it makes me smile. The open lobby area has been rearranged a bit and looks wonderful with Christmas streamers hanging from the ceiling. Ron's room is just the same as before, and although it is fairly quiet on this last school evening before Christmas break, there is still a fair amount of tutorial traffic.

In the corner behind Ron's desk lay a pile of hockey sticks and men's skates. Ron explains that he has taken to playing hockey a few times a week with the guys, although I should note that the chronic skeletal pain left from his previous five story fall seems to be much more of a burden now, and this isn't helping. We talk a bit about potential treatment and I feel badly for his pain.

We catch up, go through a few pages of the transcripts, reading notes and making corrections. We keep getting sidetracked by the 'endings' to the stories. The student who Ron was so frustrated with last year did actually graduate. He came through; though I get the sense Ron dragged him a bit. I ask Ron if he is still in the school on weekends, and he affirms this but says he is trying to be in just one day on the weekend. We segue a bit into the heaviness of the work, and this is the first time I hear Ron indicate that the 'failures' are disheartening. We talk a bit about teacher burnout, and when I remind him of my earlier question about how long he can do this, he looks thoughtful and revises his initial estimate, saying, "Nah, 2 maybe 3 years." But this is said on a day of considerable pain

and I get the real sense that he worries about not being in top form for his kids. He mentions that he isn't as patient with his kids, perhaps because of all the pain and medication, and later he indicates that he is experiencing a lot more stress this year, as a result of a staff member with whom he has conflict. He is angry and agitated about this colleague, and the problem is severe and has a long context and history.

Despite his intentions to cut back, Ron has been doing a lot more in-servicing of other teachers on best practices in evaluation, and he has also been sitting on some central office committees. He also recently had the deputy superintendent come and see one of his presentations. Yet his conversational focus is on his kids, one in remand, and a few others he is worried about.

Mid-evening, a teenage couple comes in to deliver a Christmas card. From the surrounding conversation, it is obvious that these two people have a great deal of affection for Ron. They are off elsewhere but have stopped to visit, and listen to Ron's plans for taking his own children out east. I watch the eagerness of their body language, the softness in their eyes. The care in the interaction is in contrast to the slightly tough exterior image these kids present. Their devotion to Ron is evident in their lingering. Later, Ron gives me both the card to read and a letter written by a former student who is currently incarcerated. Both of these are written as a thank you and a tribute to Ron, and are testament to the fact that these former students still feel cared for by him. Noticeably, the card is addressed to Ron's whole family: he says that his students do realize that his after-hours availability and commitment to his job does cost his family at times. As we leave and bid our season's greetings, I notice that Ron is having much more difficulty

walking than I previously noticed. As I leave Rosedale Outreach to its holiday season, I can't help but think ahead to the New Year and wonder what it will bring to Ron. Hopefully for his students, it will see Ron still behind his desk well rested and determined to tackle another semester (reconstructed from field notes, December 15, 2004).

Reflections on Ron and Rosedale Outreach School

It was very exciting to experience the stories that were being lived and told in Ron's world. I found myself reflecting that Ron and I had much in common, despite the considerable differences in life experience. We had shared "encounters of difference" and yet still found a degree of "narrative resonance" which produced "echoed stories" between us (Conle, 1996, pp. 299, 305). I was aware that Ron might perceive me in the "traditional, hierarchical view of the researcher as the expert in the research relationship" (Schulz, 1997, p. 87) and so I consciously maintained a humble position in his classroom, and in our dialogue about my observations and representations. He took to introducing me to his students as a "friend who was here to help out." As time went by, I knew he was learning to trust me because he became much less formal in his use of language and started to use the diction and syntax of street language, similar to that he used with his students, without checking himself or apologizing as he had previously. It was through a hermeneutic intention to maintain a "deep attentiveness to language itself" (Smith, 1991, p. 199) that I understood the symbolism behind this shift in syntax as being accepted within his inner circle. This step was essential to the authenticity of the research, for Ron often adopts the stance of someone who has lived on the margins of society resentfully,

and he simultaneously respects and rejects those who he perceives to hold positions of authority. Through our shared "mediation of meaning" (Smith, 1991) he felt his life story to be affirmed and validated. However, toward the end of the research, when we did not spend long periods of time together quite so often, Ron seemed to reposition me as someone who had legitimacy in the educational community. I felt this most strongly when he asked me for a letter of reference for a teaching position he sought.

Some threads in Ron's retelling of himself, and my own observations, suggest that the place in the outreach school community in which he felt most comfortable was in his own classroom, and he used this space deliberately to maintain both a sense of inclusiveness and exclusivity depending on his purposes. Here, he could speak freely to his students about the lessons of his past. Assuming the role of shepherd for "the worst of the worst", Ron was able to maintain a "unity of life…the coherence of a life-story" in purposeful composition and revision of his own autobiographical story (Carr, 1986, p. 74). I believe he used this place to help him in his intentional reconstruction of stories that were "designed to give meaning to the events and convey a particular sense of experience" (Carter, 1993, p. 8), particularly in his retelling of vignettes that demonstrate his approach to at-risk students. Carter notes that stories exist and are told within a social context and often to fulfill a purpose, and this can be seen not only in the way Ron and I shared his stories, but in the way he storied his previous life for his students, and the way he storied the outreach school in his interactions with members of the broader communities. Through the telling of these stories in the various communities, perhaps Ron might have been taking a hand "in our personal and professional development by

strengthening certain stories and countering others" (Conle, 1996, p. 317), while posing counternarratives (hooks, 1997) to help others re-imagine a school life.

Although Ron's preferred community of place was in his classroom with students and their families, within the concentric rings of related communities, Ron often situated himself as an informal leader. He appeared to do so deliberately, seeing his engagement in the broader social and political spheres as instrumental to his work with his students. A good example of this would be his work in-servicing other teachers, or approaching local citizens to advocate for the program. He often seemed of two minds about these interactions, both desiring full membership and recognition in these communities and at the same time dismissing their importance in his teaching life. When Ron tells stories, he characterizes himself as someone in the community who will challenge assumptions rooted in social injustice, someone who is not afraid to ask others to think differently about what builds a successful education experience and how to measure success. He had no difficulty acting in a determined manner to achieve his ends, but told these stories in a language that indicated tension with the boundaries inherent in a place subjected to the metanarratives of a larger institution. This comes through in his frustration with the time he spends "answering for transgressions" and the tension between the autonomy he has and the expectation to adhere to external policies.

Throughout the two years I worked with Ron, there were stories lived through action, stories told through telling and retelling, and stories told through silence, inarticulate or just barely audible (Neumann, 1997). Some of the stories that Ron kept private had to do with the nature of his life as a troubled youth, involved in street level

crime, and stories to do with his subsequent substance abuse. Although he superficially sketched these aspects of his life frequently, he did not reveal details that might re-open the wounds. I only know that these experiences caused him to identify with and be fiercely devoted to those students he perceived as being drawn down these paths. These aspects of his identity are rooted in his past, but significantly inform his present and his anticipated future. I recall that Smith (1991), paraphrasing Heidegger, suggests that human experience takes place within a horizon of past, present and future, in a way that makes an understanding of the now and the new possible through the forestructure of understanding the past.

I believe that Ron's stories of practice reveal his preoccupations as they stood in his third year of teaching, but they still seem fitting for Ron now. Having completed his fifth year of teaching, he has grown a bit older and wiser, has "pulled back" and "chooses who to invest in" to use his words, but he continues to story himself as a champion of the underdog, and he continues to establish close and unconventional relationships with students (researcher journal, June 15, 2006). His teaching story is integrated within his own personal story to a considerable degree and as Carr (1986, p. 76) suggests "events that were lived in the terms of one story are now seen as part of another."

Concurrent with the time that I was spending in Ron's classroom, I was also engaging in research with another outreach school teacher in a one-room schoolhouse styled outreach school that was significantly dissimilar to Rosedale. However, as time went on, I was able to see that despite the differences in program structures and in the lives and personal histories of the individual teacher participants, there were parallel

narrative threads in the approaches and experiences of the outreach teachers in both schools, and many that had narrative resonance for me. In the following chapter, I will introduce you to Charlotte Jamison and Granville Learning Centre.

Chapter Five

Charlotte and Granville Learning Centre

Charlotte and I met a few years ago, when I was asked to join a group of teachers who serve as workshop facilitators for our provincial professional organization. She had been with this corps for a number of years, and was one of a core group who went out of their way to welcome newcomers. I was still teaching in the classroom when I joined this group, and it was not until I transferred to the outreach centre and was in the first throes of adaptation that I learned that she, too, was an outreach teacher. When I tentatively asked if she might know of anyone who would wish to participate in a research study about the experiences of outreach educators, she promptly volunteered. I was delighted.

Our conversations were conducted a bit differently than my conversations with Ron. Charlotte and I found ourselves comparing experiences, and with her encouragement I became a co-participant in shared storytelling. Because our professional and academic pursuits were similar, and our outreach schools were structured as comparable programs, we found ourselves finishing each other's thoughts regularly, and interrupting to segue elsewhere, in common understanding. As a result, much of the longer speech text sections have been re-constructed for clarity from several pages of transcripts. During the review of the taped conversations, I realized that the informal idiosyncrasies of our dialogue, pauses, tone of voice and such suggested to me that an important element of our conversation lie in the many subtle political and cultural assumptions that we shared and therefore did not always articulate. I was intuitively aware of this during the field research, and as a result there are attempts by me in

conversation to try to explicitly acknowledge and frame these understandings into language. Where it seemed that these efforts to articulate met with Charlotte's intent, I have included them here to clarify her speech.

Being at the place of Granville Outreach School and having conversations in that place had a noticeable effect on my thinking, and this translated itself into our conversations. I related my observations to my own memories of my life, my family, and more recently, of my own teaching experiences as a newcomer to the outreach school. As a result, this chapter will be framed differently than the previous chapter, with the noticeable inclusion of more first person asides, and several passages which are framed conversationally. I invite the reader to pull up a chair alongside Charlotte and I, pour a soothing beverage, and settle in for a chat.

First Visit to Granville Learning Centre

After a long drive down secondary highways flanked by fields of spring crops and grazing livestock, I arrive at the town and enter onto a tiny Main Street. Granville Learning Centre is located in a shopping plaza bay, in a small rural community outside a larger urban center. The storefront of the school faces a small but ornate village church that visually dominates the area. This end of Main Street is invariably busy on the evening that I first visit, with gangs of kids on bicycles and adults walking their toddlers and dogs up to the corner store. Students at the school have a short walk to the snack shop when they need to take a break. Nearby, the bank, café and local gym compete for parking spaces along the wide main street. Inside, the school reminds me of a large

classroom. I am reminded of my classroom from ten years ago, the year I was team teaching. A large open area opens out from the front entry, with people all engaged independently among a quiet, happy hum of activity. The walls of the learning centre are informally decorated with motivational posters and curriculum posters, about writing and literature, and the geology of the province. There is a display area for student artwork. There are several teacher desks scattered throughout the room, interspersed with round tables that comfortably seat five or six students. On each table is a tissue box. Students' belongings such as books and sweaters are scattered about the tables, some unattended by their owners who have gone for a break. Three perimeter walls of the room are lined with student work carrels that have computer screens embedded into the work counter. A fourth wall is entirely floor to ceiling windows, bringing in sunshine and a view. On the ledge an inviting jar of fresh pencils are there for the taking. There is a small white dog ambling around, nosing for leftover lunch and encouraging students to take a pet break. Student materials are readily accessible in an open bookshelf; the simple card sign out system reminds me of libraries before computer automation. A large shelf toward the back of the open space holds a selection of film resources.

At the back of the school are the only partitioned areas, the washrooms and kitchen, which are shared among staff and students. There is a tiny test-writing room, and an even smaller room for recording orally taped assignments. At this outreach centre, as at my own, there are no regularly organized classes or any attendance requirement. Students have at their disposal a study and work area, but there is no expectation that they attend, and so many work independently at home or in other places of their choosing.

In the background, behind the hum of computers, I can hear Charlotte tutoring a student on a math concept. When she tutors students, they sit *beside* her and work from her side of the desk. I like the comfort level this implies, the intimacy of it. At my outreach school, our desks are L shaped so that students sit *across* the desk from the teacher and it always makes me feel constrained. I am, however, learning to read upside down very well.

While Charlotte waits for her student to complete a question before they move on, she makes a quick phone call to check on another student's progress. The students address her and her teaching partner by their first names, and she addresses herself this way when she phones their homes. She introduces herself to the person answering, and then asks to speak directly to the student. Students are aware of my presence; they eye me as I enter, but as I speak with one of the teachers and continue to write my field notes, they seem to disregard my presence. One strikes up a brief chat with me, sharing excitedly the good news of her college acceptance that very day. Charlotte's teaching partner, Don, is quietly counselling a student over the phone. From this end, it sounds like a romantic break-up has been affecting the student's progress, and the teacher reminds the student that there is someone here to listen if they feel like talking.

As I try not to eavesdrop, I notice how sound carries; everyone's conversation is available to everyone else. Throughout the evening, both students and staff routinely include everyone in the room in their general conversation. Two people sitting very close and speaking quietly signal more private conversations. I think about the intimacy of tribal living in native North American societies, and the complex social understandings

that allow others privacy even in very close quarters. People conduct themselves in a manner that suggests familiarity. The staff is dressed casually, in jeans and sandals, and staff members greet all the students and their parents by name. As the evening passes, I see students coming in to the learning center individually or in small groups. Some students appear to seek a quiet place to work while others seek tutorial help. I get the sense that there is no private territory, little need for rules beyond that of customary courtesy. For most of this first evening, Charlotte is occupied phoning students or tutoring students. When we get a chance to chat, we join the other teacher, Don, and June, the secretary who takes care of the administrative support aspects of the learning center. We compare outreach schools, and lament the need to "pay for oneself" vis-à-vis credit funding, and we share our irritation at have to consider balancing the books when we would just rather focus solely on serving student needs (reconstructed from field notes, May 12, 2004).

The place of Granville is typical of other Alberta outreach schools (Beeson, 2001; Bouska, 2001) and reflects what Raywid refers to as the "magic" of alternative schools, "reflected in the sounds and appearance of the place, and expressed even more directly in the words and behavior of students and teachers" (1993, p. 23)

Introducing Charlotte Jamison

A veteran teacher, Charlotte Jamison (a pseudonym) has a wealth of life and professional experience to offer her students. An athletic youth, raised in Montreal, Charlotte had been involved in competitive swimming and had considered competitive

skiing as an Olympic hopeful for a time. After obtaining undergraduate degrees in Elementary Education and Recreation Management, Charlotte first started working with kindergarten students in New Brunswick. After one year, she decided to try to find a job as close to the mountains as possible. She secured a teaching job in a small town near the Rocky Mountains in a Grade 2 classroom, but after 5 years she took a leave of absence from her board, frustrated by the lack of opportunity for movement in her district. She taught in Calgary for a year, and returned to her previous post the following year, accepting a position teaching junior high school Math, Science, and Phys. Ed. in a French immersion setting. Her teaching assignment changed from year-to-year and in her final year of teaching, her assignment included French 10, 20, 30, Math and Science at Grades 8 and 9 and wildlife studies. As a result of her teaching experiences, her teaching practice is rooted in the habits and approach of a generalist, even though she has much of the formal schooling of a subject specialist.

In the late 1990s, Charlotte left her teaching job to begin graduate work, and upon completion of her master's degree in education, she was accepted into a doctoral program. During her doctoral program, Charlotte had a graduate assistantship that afforded her the opportunity to teach pre-service education students in their introductory professional student teaching placements, and a senior course regarding integrating technology into the senior high mathematics curriculum. During this time, she was also involved in completing contract work planning and presenting sessions at various math symposiums for the Edmonton Regional Consortium. She was approached by her current board to take a contract within an Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI)

project to integrate technology into the existing core curricula materials used in an outreach school. In this placement, she had the opportunity to explore first-hand the place and program considerations of an outreach school. When that contract expired, she was convinced to take a position as a math/sciences teacher at her current location. At this point in her career, Charlotte has taught kindergarten through Grade 12, in a multiplicity of subject areas, and at the undergraduate level. This range of teaching experience is invaluable to her, as her assignment at the Learning Centre makes her responsible for all high school math and science courses, as well as French and the Career and Technology Studies courses, a total of about 30 different courses.

On Finding Ourselves in the Outreach School

I have been interested in how educators come to teach in outreach schools, and have made it a point of conversation when I am with other outreach teachers. Charlotte's story of coming to work at Granville Learning Centre is surprisingly practical: burdened with student loans and the need for income, Charlotte allowed herself to be persuaded to interview for a posting which had recently been vacated by an acquaintance.

> I was traveling through the Balkans, in Romania and my partner called me. He said, "Ah, Robert called and he wants you to apply for this position. Do you want to apply?" I said, "No", because I was working on my candidacy proposal at the time and I was involved in projects I was doing with other professors as well. So I just said, "No, don't worry about it, I'm not interested." So I got home at about two o'clock in the morning and then the phone rang at seven o'clock the next morning. It was Robert. He said, "You have an interview this afternoon at three o'clock." I was shocked because I hadn't even applied. So I went to the interview, and then I was phoned that evening, and offered the position. I needed to buy a new computer and to have money would be great. But it took a phone call from the principal, a phone call from Robert, a phone call from the Human Resource

> person and a phone call from the Superintendent before I finally agreed. (transcript, May 20, 2004, p. 6)

Charlotte's unplanned arrival at the Learning Centre reminds me of how I found myself at our local outreach school almost by accident as well. Because my (then) current school needed to cut staff, I was forced to start looking for a new position one spring. I considered a posting at the local high school, but my associate superintendent asked me to go over and visit the local outreach school, in hopes that I would be interested in joining the program. Two hours later, after a full tour, program overview and a lot of informal mutual interviewing, the principal told me that he had an as yet unadvertised opening and suggested that I would be a perfect fit. I chose to accept the posting because it had a half-time junior high component, which I preferred, and because the high school assignment included special needs students and Integrated Occupational Program courses, neither of which I aspired to tackle. Ironically, during my time at Storefront School, I would develop a reputation for being successful with these very students.

Reflections on Transition

It was during my first two months in the outreach centre that I realized that as exhilarating as it was to have an entirely new role to learn and tailor, I was also feeling what I could only describe as homesick, a kind of ache for all the familiar things about the regular classroom, even things I used to dislike. It was with some relief that I heard Charlotte's contradictory feelings about missing school.

> It's a hard transition to make, but it was a different situation for me than for you… I've been out of the classroom for a few years and taught some courses at

> the university. I made a deliberate choice to leave the classroom…There's a sense of mourning that goes along with leaving the regular classroom, and as much as I love being in the learning centre and I wouldn't go back into a traditional classroom, I do miss the whole school atmosphere… I miss the kids and coaching sports, I even miss doing supervision and the way you can connect with kids on that different level than in the classroom. And I like to talk, and you don't always get to talk at a learning centre. (reconstructed from transcript, May 20, 2004, pp. 14–15, 20)

Both Charlotte and I had experienced a sense of grief and loss about leaving the traditional classroom, even though it was a chance to try something new. For Charlotte, the busyness and interaction of the school was something she remembered fondly. I missed the routines and rituals, and the headlong pace of the day. These occasional feelings of mourning had lasted into the third year of outreach practice for us, respectively. However, there were other factors that made the transition to outreach pleasurable for Charlotte, and she cited many reasons for staying on.

> I love the dynamics of working with the kids, that one on one, the closeness that you never see with the kids when you're in a classroom of 35 students. You just don't get to know the kids there, the way that you get to know them in the Learning Centre. It's nice to know that you have an impact on these kids and these kids will tell you, or their parents will tell you. I just find that the dynamics are just so different. In regular school, it's like a barrier that's always there, but it's not there. I don't know if that makes any sense. Maybe it's in the teacher role versus the student role, that power difference. I've always believed that there should be a more even playing field. I mean we still ultimately have a certain degree of authority, but the power level is more even here. Here, the kids make the choice whether or not they come to the Learning Center or not. They can work here or they can work at home. They decide. If they want to go out for 3 hours for lunch, they do. They don't have all those rules and procedures and policies. (transcript, May 20, 2004, p. 9)

Charlotte's last few sentences in this excerpt reveal an important element about Granville Learning Centre, and something I noticed on my first visit; a sense of freedom from some of the power and rigidity inherent in traditional schools. In her writing about the culture

of place, Polakow and Sherif (1987, p. 5) suggest that children seek places where they can escape the control of others, and where they themselves have control, a process of "spatialization of power." Childress (2000) makes a similar argument regarding teenagers and their desperate appropriation of leftover spaces. At Granville Learning Centre, students' freedom to use space and time is part and parcel of an ethos that minimizes institutionalization of practices.

In my own transition to the outreach school setting, this relative freedom from rules and procedures was difficult initially, but that is because sometimes educators rely on the external and rigid aspects of school to guide our expectations and interactions. In a large school, it is this set of expectations that help establish the consistency and predictability so practical in institutions. It is clear that in her remembering, Charlotte frames her experiences in the outreach centre in direct comparison with her many years in the typical classroom community, and in many instances, finds the outreach centre has a different tone that allows a level of interactive focus that she had not experienced in the traditional classroom.

> Even with the real tough kids, the rotters, you still find something about them that's good. I think that that gets really coloured over in a large classroom of kids. You just see that one bad thing all the time and you don't get to see the student when they're doing something good. You're so busy doing something else for somebody else. In the learning centre, you are more likely to catch that glimpse of who the kid really is. You can catch them doing the good things, and then you can work on it and bring it out even more. (transcript, May 20, 2004, p. 10)

Writers on identity and learning point out that "in school, children become one of a type" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000, p. 236). Charlotte's comment implies her awareness and

discomfort with this, and her willingness to engage with students to look beyond their "type," an attitude well employed when working with at-risk youth.

Charlotte initially recalled her transition into the outreach centre as being fairly painless, noting, "I had been out of the classroom for four years, so I didn't really have trouble adjusting. It is amazing how fast you can forget your previous life and it doesn't always come forward in your consciousness again" (transcript, May 20, 2004, p. 39). However, in later storytelling Charlotte rediscovered memories of her first few weeks at Granville, and she reflects on these with a certain amount of rue.

> I didn't do the boxes of Kleenex thing. I was mourning, but I still really loved being here, so the adjustment wasn't as bad as it could have been had I gone from being in a classroom the year before. You just never know what you're going to get in the space of a day. One minute you're helping a kid with Physics 30, the next minute you're doing Science 14, and then you're doing Math Pure 30 or 31. You're just always juggling it. It was very overwhelming that way, and I was trying to get used to the routine.
>
> I started work here on a Tuesday, and that Thursday night, I was here alone. It was October, beginning of October, so you're still registering kids like crazy. The phones are ringing off the hook. So you're expected to get all the phone calls, register kids, help these nine kids that are in for help tonight. You're dealing with everything. I just felt like "I am not going to survive!" I know I was like that up until spring break, I just felt so overwhelmed when I was here alone. When people would call and I wouldn't know the answers to stuff, I felt so useless because when I watched the other teacher, she had been here since the beginning and had all the answers to everything and knew everything. I felt like, "I'm so incompetent," and that's it! It's that being competent, when you were in the classroom, to being put into a place where you just feel like you're ten feet below the surface because there's just so much to do. I didn't know how many courses you had to have to graduate and that there was a specific combination of courses that you had to have to graduate. I didn't know how many hours for work experience or for doing visitations. I had no idea. You find that as you go and it just takes time. It wasn't after the first year either that I had all the answers, it wasn't after the second year, and I still don't have all the answers. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp.45–47)

Transition into a new school community and a new role isn't something that takes a few months. After a semester or so I found that I was starting to be able to look like I knew what I was doing, where things were, what the routines were, but I was still a neophyte for quite some time. I found that it was only about partway through my second year that I started to feel like I had become part of the tribe to the extent that I could start to initiate a conversation about change, or take on added leadership. The process was accelerated in my third year when I was asked to participate in an administrative mentorship at that site, and devote a portion of my time to learning the role of an administrator.

Charlotte has been through a similar process, and recalls the way she felt when her teaching partner, who had been at the school for many years, left to teach at the local high school.

> She had been here since it opened in 1998, and it was a bit of a loss because suddenly everybody was looking at me for answers. I found it very daunting. A lot of the things that had just been in practice we had to articulate… When Don came June and I sat down and made out a whole detailed list of 'this-is-how-you-do-it'. (transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 59, 62)

Being in the role of a mentor is one way that we realize the extent that we have become encultured. Charlotte was left by default to mentor the new humanities teacher, and perhaps it was in this process that her transition to outreach was finally complete. Inhabiting a variety of roles and experiencing time in a different way are two of the lived experiences that Charlotte returns to often in her reflections on both her transition to outreach and her current practice.

Experiencing Time an a Diffusion of Roles

Reflecting on a typical day, Charlotte explains,

> I usually get in by 8:15am. The first thing I usually do in the morning is turn on the computer, look at email and deal with any phone messages that came in during the night. Then I get to marking, because the kids don't usually come in early in the morning. As kids come in, then I am spending time with them, tutoring or just talking…We have a routine here in terms of the types of tasks that need to be done. When the students are here and they need help, that is what takes precedence. I drop anything and everything if a student needs some help because I don't want to make them wait.
>
> There is lots of discussion time, just impromptu kinds of situations. Kids will ask questions and then you get off topic and onto another discussion and everybody in the learning centre gets into that one conversation… It happens fairly frequently, but is usually falls out of what you are working on with the student… I think it is really important because that is where the whole relationship building happens. A lot of times, kids just want to talk to you because they like you or they want to get to know you a bit better, or sometimes it is just to take a break from work. (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 21–22, 31)

Charlotte's observation makes me think about a student that I have been working with for the last 3 years. A very bright young man, with psychiatric and learning disabilities, Mark likes to debate politics and philosophy with me. I often have to tell him that he has got to work on his English modules for 40 minutes, and then we can debate for 20 minutes. Otherwise, neither one of us would ever get anything else done. Occasionally, I justify this use of time to myself through the English learner outcomes that refer to students entertaining diverse viewpoints and articulating their own. When I share this story, Charlotte smiles and suggests,

> Sometimes it doesn't need to be attached to the curriculum either. I think for a lot of kids, seeing their teachers in a different light can balance the other experiences

> they have had in school. That is one of the unique things here." (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 33)

The availability of teachers for conversation is suggested as being one of the most important elements for establishing trust (Conrath, 2001; Deiro, 1995).

Charlotte's recollections of how she spends time have a distinct feeling of ebb and flow, and fluid routines that shift with the presence of other people within the learning community. This sense of ebb and flow is also dependent on the time of year or semester. As in the typical classroom setting, there are busy times and slower times, but there is a noticeable shift in the impetus for these variations. In one outreach school, teacher time is occupied for 30% of the time with teaching, 50% counselling and 20% completing paperwork, "not the usual job description for the traditional high school teacher" (Bouska 2001, p. 14).

When we talk about time, Charlotte muses,

> In the beginning of the school year there is extra administration as teachers get involved with the registering of students and planning their semester with them. We spend a lot more time in meetings because we get many students from the high school and part of the referral system calls for meetings. Then things get under way with the course work, and it is hectic. But there is often a lull the week right before Christmas, and that is when we redo exams. After Christmas we go flat out. Everything is so fast because we are getting ready for running all the diploma exams, and the marking is really coming in, and the kids need extra tutorial help. I tend to do the marking at home, and write exams here. I make myself available to kids on the weekend and at on the phone at home if they need extra help. During summer school, it is just nuts. You can take out your sandwich at noon, and if you have finished it by 2:30 p.m., it's been a slow day. We put in 12 and 14 hour days then and make as many credits in one month as we do in one winter semester. (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 34–40, 43)

In an outreach centre, time is often allocated based on the impetus from students. I find myself thinking about the classroom and how the teacher traditionally organizes and

directs time. In response to this idea, Charlotte laughs, and says, "Well, you can't do that here. You can't control anything here" (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 26).

In response to the fluid nature of time at the outreach school, Charlotte's administrator has created an informal flex time arrangement for the staff, depending on whether they work during the summer term or not. Charlotte was able to take personal leave days to present at conferences in exchange for some time owed from the previous summer. Despite this flexibility, there is still some tension for Charlotte in the negotiation of her time, and she notes that she has been trying to say no more often, especially to requests for further involvement with professional development. Ruefully she notes, "Sometimes it's easy to start with the little no's, but I cannot say no to kids. They know that I am a big soft heart and that they have me right around their little finger" (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 46).

During our conversations, Charlotte often self-identifies as someone who does not readily work inside the confines of institutionalized and regulated time parameters. When I asked her to try to notice her use of time over a two week period, Charlotte, a self-described "mad scientist type," documented her time by minutes and then categorized, compared, charted, and graphed her findings.

Without irony Charlotte explains,

> I am not a segmented person. I cannot live in little boxes. In a regular school there's always somebody there checking over you and making sure that you are doing what you should be, and the bell keeps ringing. It makes me feel like Pavlov's dog! That drove me to distraction, and then the kids were always watching the clock, thinking, 'There's only 5 more minutes'. So the sense of time here is very different. You don't have to do certain things at certain times, and that makes me feel like I am a valued person. If I have a medical appointment, I

> can go without it being a big deal. There are things to get done here, lots of it, but so long as it gets done my principal doesn't care how or when, or whether I do it at home or here if that is appropriate. For example, with organizing this conference, I can best reach people during the day. No one cares if I do that here if I am willing to take my marking home, or write the exams at home. The end result is that I am not counting the days until Christmas or summer the way you often hear teachers do in the regular school. When I quit teaching to do my masters, going to school everyday was becoming more like going to work every day. I am not coming to work anymore; I am not going to school anymore. I'm just going to Granville.

I know exactly what she is talking about. I agree, saying,

> You know, I remember thinking, 'Here comes the bell, better get to class, chop, chop, 5 minutes until the end of class, so I better impose closure on this lesson, even if it isn't truly over.' I noticed in your notes that this week you worked with one student for about 70 minutes. Didn't you get the feeling that you had better get on to other things?

Charlotte answers simply,

> No. When students come in and they need help, that needs to be done then and there, so you drop everything and you work with them. You don't just say, "Okay, I've got other things to do" and you push them along. That just doesn't happen. (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 1–6)

Time has a quality in an outreach school that differs noticeably from the strict routine of the regular classroom; it's a departure from the norm that leaves one with the sense that time somehow has fewer borders, an organic quality that comes from living more in the moment, not in the plan book. This elasticity of time is not unusual in outreach schools, and is often extended to students in the form of flexible due dates for assignments (Van Slyke, 2001). Charlotte's face to face time with students is one of the few things she holds sacrosanct, but the other aspects of her professional role can be interchangeable with her time at home, as the need arises. Time is permeable and porous within the entirety of Charlotte's time, in a way that suggests a stance of *responding*

rather than *initiating*. Charlotte refers to this as responding to need as it arises. This phrase, "responding as the need arises" is the common thread that underscores the multiplicity of roles that Charlotte and the staff at Granville Learning Centre inhabit.

Responding to Need As It Arises

One of the characteristics of Granville and other outreach schools is the multiplicity of roles that staff members adopt. Beeson (2001, p. 16) notes that outreach staff "facilitate, counsel, administer, chair meetings, pursue professional development, attend provincial committees and meet with parents". Since Granville Learning Centre is staffed by just two full time teachers, a part time teacher and a part time administrative support person, every adult ends up taking on a vast array of roles, a process that Charlotte refers to as 'wearing hats.' Since there are no substitutes hired for short term absences, when the school is short-handed, everyone must pitch in. These roles are situational and interdependent on other conditions. Factors such as the time of year, a staff member's illness, or externally determined demands, such as diploma exam supervision all mean that staff must be willing and able to respond on an as-needed basis. Charlotte's anecdotes also reveal that there is noticeable overlap in who fulfills various roles: if you are an adult and it needs doing, then it is part of your job. Everyone must be willing to serve in many roles for a diverse client group with needs that are not always noticed in the typical high school.

> Because I am the senior staff member here now, and serve as the counsellor, whenever an issue arises and an administrator isn't readily available, I'm the person who deals with it. Sometimes we have to feed kids, so I will take them to

> Costco and buy them the staples that they need. We take the money out of the swear jar, or we collect money between us. For a while, we had a playpen here for a student who would bring her baby, but then it was no longer being used, so we gave it to another girl who was expecting a baby and didn't have resources. We are also busy developing independent module CTS courses that aren't available commercially so that we can offer our students more choices. We act in an ad hoc manner, responding to need as it arises. That's the same thing as the drug education work that we have been doing with the community. We saw a need in the community, because drug use is very high here and entrenched in the teen culture. (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 55–58)

When asked if she would change anything about how she inhabits the role of the outreach teacher, Charlotte seems baffled by my question.

> I couldn't see it any other way. Maybe I am being narrow-minded but I don't know any other way to live it than the way that I live it. As far as the way that I teach, the way that I am with kids, I don't think I could do it differently because I am who I am and it really comes out for me in my position here. (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 34)

This response epitomizes the level at which Charlotte's role as an educator is embedded into her identity of herself as a whole person, and the extent to which her self-as-teacher is based in knowledge that comes from ways of being, in a way that suggests that she is aware of her own sense of vocation, and aware of what Palmer (1997) calls the *teacher within*. As Palmer (p. 8) suggests, it appears that Charlotte can listen to the voice inside that says, "This is what fits you and this is what doesn't."

Charlotte suggests that one of the biggest roles that outreach teachers play in the community is that of a liaison, between the high school and the family, as well as social agencies. Teaching staff are often involved in informal transition planning to help students reintegrate into the regular high school, and have also created partnerships between the school and the library, the town council, the local drug counselling agencies,

and other partnerships with nearby towns, including a new collaboration in the works with nearby young offender's penal institution. This last partnership involves cohabitating with another outreach school that serves students through the institution, and is newly initiated at the administrative level. As the teachers at Granville have not yet been consulted, this causes Charlotte no small amount of worry. She is concerned that it will change how the community perceives the school, and negatively affect her at-risk student population.

> It has me extremely worried because a lot of kids that we have here, one push will get them to where they don't need to be. We don't want to have to be going outside to tell kids who are hanging around the cars out front not to be there. We'd like to have our cars intact so that we can drive home at the end of the day. (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 81)

Charlotte's consideration for the perception of the community, and for the welfare of students, some of whom are future students, indicates the level of her commitment to the school itself beyond just the expectations of her job. She voices a need to protect her school and students from an initiative she is not convinced has been thought through carefully.

On Being Part of a Community of Practice

One weekend as Charlotte and I are training to deliver a new workshop, I become aware of my own discomfort, my own sense of otherness in a room of enthusiastic classroom teachers. When I broach this subject with Charlotte, she immediately understands what I am referring to. Charlotte says softly,

> Sometimes I just feel so far removed now from what other teachers are experiencing in their classrooms and that's one thing about facilitating these workshops that I'm still grappling with. How can I go out and deal with a workshop specific to the classroom? So I make a deliberate choice not to take that type of workshop anymore. It's been since 1998 that I've been in a classroom. That's 6 years ago and it's too far away now for me. I don't feel like I have that credibility anymore to go in and give something like the portfolio assessment workshop.

I have often thought the same thing. I add,

> As I'm listening to the workshop content and these great ideas, I'm reaching back into memories of 'I used to do this and I used to do that'. There's that moment of fondness for the classroom and then I find myself doing this translation thing. I use a second language or double language to speak. I'm translating concepts, philosophies, theories, ideas and the filter that I'm translating through is 'Could I …or *how* could I use this with my outreach kids?'

Charlotte nods thoughtfully,

> I noticed I was doing that the other day with the discipline workshop. I was thinking there are some things that are still pertinent to each of the contexts that you are teaching in. You know a lot of people don't understand what happens in an outreach school. Some people may not even think you are a real teacher; they're surprised to hear that we actually have Bachelor's and Master's degrees. And sometimes people act like you've been relegated to the old folk's home, or the bad teacher's home, that you couldn't cut it in the classroom, therefore you're in an outreach school. (reconstructed from transcript, May 20, 2004, pp. 13–14, 17–18)

I remember when we had to cut staff at my junior high school and I was encouraged to go to the outreach school. The school needed an English specialist, but underneath the sense of being needed and wanted, I wondered if something wasn't being implied about my teaching skills. This came from the pre-conceived notions I had about the local outreach school. After I had worked there for awhile, I realized that perhaps the message was a positive message about my ability to think divergently and to handle a wide variety of situations. When I offer this observation to Charlotte she agrees that this

is an important part of the job. Housego (1999) supports this through her assessment of positive characteristics of outreach educators, which includes having broad life and teaching experience, maturity, self-directedness and willingness to problem solve through unconventional approaches.

It is Charlotte's breadth of professional roles that give her the versatility she needs in her practice. In addition to her graduate work at the university, and her role facilitating workshops around the province, she also is involved with two specialist councils, helping to organize this year's conference for one. As well, she is involved with presenting workshops for the regional professional development consortium, and has recently taken on speaking engagements for internationally recognized academic associations such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA). It is ironic that such an accomplished educator would ever have to consider that she might not be recognized by others as a "real teacher".

When I ask Charlotte if she sees outreach teachers fulfilling some sort of role within their districts, she hedges her response.

> What would I like to see or what is reality? People don't really know who we are and what we are about. When I first started, I remember I felt totally isolated and it came from the fact that I didn't feel like I was part of anything other than a learning centre. I felt undervalued by the rest of the staff in the school division, unknown. They say it's the retirement home. They put people there who don't know how to teach. I didn't get those comments directly but they filtered down. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 46–47)

This experience is not unusual for outreach educators. Tymensen (2001, p. 11) reveals that despite high enrolments in outreach schools, most outreach schools only employ a few teachers, who are often alone, and "like castaways, they are isolated and trapped on a

small island surrounded by a turbulent sea. The outside world does not often know they exist."

Charlotte's comments remind me of my own sense of unease. When I was new at Storefront and was meeting former colleagues who asked what was new, I found myself speaking very highly of the outreach program, as a way of trying to increase others' positive perceptions of the school. I remember gritting my teeth when someone well-meaning would say, "You must love it there! You have nothing to do all day but mark a few kids' assignments. Maybe I should try to get on there?" I would hasten to explain the depth of the program and the breadth of service to the individual students, but it was difficult for others to see it as a rigorous job, when curriculum planning and classroom management were not the bulk of the task. I hoped that this way I could champion a good cause and also increase my own status by refuting others' presumptions that this was a school for discarded teachers. In retrospect, because of others' lack of understanding and the invisible nature of our school within the division, I think I felt marginalized and perhaps somewhat discarded myself. Charlotte offers some similar observations.

> We are not always treated with courtesy within our division. For example, last year we had a teacher here who had filled in a part time contract for the rest of the school year and she was hoping to stay on this year. Believe it or not, she found out from a student from another school that she was not being offered a contract because somebody else was being transferred in here. So when those sorts of things happen, it really gets your back up. That's that whole undervalued, unappreciated feeling, the feeling of being the appendage that nobody wants, but really wants because we generate so many credits. The attitude is "You'll take care of all the kids that we don't want in the classroom anymore. Kids that are suspended and expelled, well, we'll just send them to Granville." (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 46–47)

Charlotte also tells an anecdote that suggests that one colleague holds the perception that the outreach teachers can be used as off-site assistants.

> Don got really upset with the counsellor at the high school earlier this week because she phoned three times that morning to get him to look up some student transcript information on the government extra-net. They phone all the time for this. When he finally got frustrated and asked her why she did not have access to the extra-net, she said she did. She hasn't called back since then. (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 64)

Charlotte sums up her perception of the attitudes and lack of understanding of the community of educators in her district.

> I would like more people to see we have a really valuable program going on here and not that it's the place where you put all the bad kids and the dealers, because I find that very depressing. They don't really see us as part of the school division, although now there are two teachers who have worked here and then moved back into the regular school and so others ask them questions like, "What do you people do over there?" Prior to this year, we never had people applying for summer school postings. This year we had 35 people apply for a point eight job. So people are starting to find out about us. (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 70–72)

In seeking the understanding and increased awareness of the professional community, Charlotte's stance supports Conrath's (2001) claims that alternative school educators have a responsibility to insist on being part of a systemic intervention on behalf of at-risk youth, and that these same educators must show other educators that alternative schools are consistent with the ideology of public education. In her perceptions, Charlotte voices a complex combination of frustration, disbelief and tentative hope. I see an active member in the professional community voicing stories that are essentially 'outsider' stories, and yet there are also 'insider' stories as well, about the place of Granville

Learning Centre itself, and a sense that she feels very lucky to be part of such an enterprise.

Musings on Collegiality

Granville Learning Centre is one of two outreach programs operated by this jurisdiction. The sister school is located in a nearby community and these two schools are under the de facto supervision of the principal of the local area high school. However, Charlotte reveals that administration is only occasionally on-site, and is consulted only rarely. Usually, the administration defers to the expertise of the outreach staff. Charlotte summarizes the role her principal plays as a protective one.

> When he came in 2 years ago, his idea was that if it wasn't broken he wasn't going to try to fix it. Sometimes the heat comes onto him, and I am sure he has defused a few things that have come down from the board, but it hasn't been brought to us in any way. He forms a cocoon for us here. (transcript, June 25, 2004, p. 34)

This metaphor of the outreach school as a cocoon, a place of incubation and metamorphosis, is a powerful comment on the possibilities of outreach for transformation. This transformation affects students and teachers, but possibly can also be an opportunity for administrators to reconsider the notion of self-directed teams, and how that can work in the development of staff. In this case, this administrator's stance may indicate that the administration recognizes that there is a special synergy here that he should not try to externally direct.

Charlotte explains that most professional development days are spent collaborating with staff at the other outreach school, and that the exception to this is when

there are district-wide goals which require in-servicing. Charlotte feels she is stronger in some of the sciences than others. As their skills and training are complementary, she and the math/science teacher at her sister outreach site routinely call one another for curriculum support.

Charlotte was initially introduced to both these outreach sites when she was under contract to complete the division's Alberta Initiative for School Improvement project, and because she was on-site but not working with students, she formed some early impressions as an observer first.

> I was just so amazed and delighted with the setting, with the way that they dealt with kids. The collegiality is so much greater than in schools because you're working in the same space as these two other people all day long. The whole team work thing takes on new meaning. For example, I will try to help humanities students on Don's day off, because that is what I think our mandate is. Regardless of who is here, if it is not your subject area, it doesn't take much to go and get the guide book and give the student a few pointers to get them over the hurdle. (transcript, May 20, 2004, pp. 5–6)

Just as Charlotte is aware of the importance of team between teachers, she is also aware of the enormous contribution of her administrative support personnel.

> June was my rock when I first started, my guide at the side, especially when I was counselling for high school completion requirements. I used to counsel kids and then leave her notes to check to make sure I got it right…She has been a secretary for 30 years, and has been here since this place opened. She's the master here; if she wasn't here we'd be so lost. (transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 63, 84)

One of the noticeable differences in the outreach schools I have spent time in is that paraprofessional staff members have an increased role and an increased voice in decisions that have traditionally been within the strict purview of the teacher. Beeson (2001, p. 17) notes that in one outreach school, the administrative assistant is the most

important person on staff, who keeps staff "sane, cool and collected, organized (and) informed on a daily basis about policy changes." Part of this comes from the fluid nature of roles in the outreach school. Charlotte has a similar story.

> We do work together as a team, it is certainly not individual. We all have an equal voice here, even when it comes to some things that are about teaching. June will say, 'There's a new curriculum coming out in science but I don't think we should offer it until all the materials are ordered.' She remembers when we started on a new series of modules and the last ones weren't ready on time and so we were trying to get kids though the course without materials. There are some things that we don't share. June would never do marking, and I can't submit marks to the government, but we all answer phones and try to respond to the questions no matter what they are, so we all have to know a little bit about what each other does. (transcript, June 25, 2004, p. 30)

Just as there are many professional roles that need to be attended to in a small outreach school, there are also informal sociological roles that people tend to take on. Charlotte characterizes the other members of her staff in descriptors that unconsciously invoke typical familial roles.

> Don is the strong arm; he's like the enforcer because he comes from a very strong disciplinary background. He does a very good job with kids that need to be handled with a rougher touch. I'm the one with the kid gloves, who tries to make everyone feel happy, saying, "We can work on it," and being supportive. June is the big mom; I call her Mom all the time. (transcript, June 25, 2004, p. 30)

This echoes roles in my own family: my eldest sister was a force, second only to my father. My other sister often took on the role of the peacemaker, trying to smooth things over whenever there was conflict. These are archetypal roles inhabited by many families. The primacy and centrality of the maternal role is acknowledged in Charlotte's description of June as "the big mom," and the fact that she offers no supporting

description but relies on the archetype of the role to speak for itself. Having met Charlotte's own mom, I know this title is offered reverently.

Like many families, and most communities, sometimes there are members who do not fit in. It could be that these individuals do not wish to become an embedded part and so remain aloof, or it could be that circumstances do not support their full membership in the learning community. Outreach schools are sometimes staffed with part-time educators when the rigors of curriculum transcend a generalist approach. In both of our outreach schools, Charlotte and I worked with part-time subject specialist staff members.

Part time teaching has a whole set of its own experiences. At one point on conversation with Charlotte, I share the concerns of my colleague. I explain,

> Anna says she feels a bit like an extra-service person sometimes. Even though she has been there almost since the school opened, because she only works part time, she often feels like she doesn't really have much of a voice. She doesn't realize that she is marginalizing herself because she is only there a very little bit and so doesn't participate in a lot of staff stuff.

Charlotte relates that she also has a staff member who doesn't quite fit in either.

> Roger isn't here enough to really fill any role, so as awful as it is to say, he doesn't completely fit in. His time is divided between here and his other school and so when he is here he works with his own students, or does his own marking but he doesn't usually get involved with answering the phone or responding to the general needs of kids as they come in. It's like he is part of the staff but at arm's length. I wish this was different, because it kind of defeats what we are trying to build here in terms of a sense of community and cooperation. With our extra initiatives like the drug education program, the more people you have contributing, the better and bigger and more you can do. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 31–33)

In a larger school setting, the role of the part time teacher may not be as distinct from that of the full time teacher, but in the outreach school this difference becomes more visible

and adds additional interpersonal challenges for those people who value a sense of community. This is only one of many challenges that present themselves in an alternate teaching environment, where closeness can be both an asset and also cause individuals to feel a sense of suffocation.

Teaching in the Fishbowl

When discussing with Charlotte my own transition to the outreach school, I found it uncanny the way she was able to articulate many of my experiences, things about which I had contradictory feelings. For example, as much as I had enormous regard for my staff, who had been thoroughly nurturing, I still found myself sometimes avoiding socializing with them, and feeling that somehow they were a little too close most of the time. My friend and colleague, Anna said it best, "That is because we are living in a fishbowl." When I shared this metaphor with Charlotte she could immediately relate.

> Sometimes you want to take some people and strangle them but you can't because you have to work together, so you need to find ways of getting along with people, accept the way that they are and move on. If you don't, it is going to drive you around the bend… And it took me almost a year to get used to people listening to my phone conversations with kids or their parents. I just didn't want them listening to me, but you get used to it. It's like sharing a bedroom with a sibling or five. You are invading each others' space all of the time…But I am not perfect. I leave stuff everywhere sometimes, and it has been really hard not to do that here, but I have become much better organized. It has spilled over onto home even. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 35–37)

Charlotte's analogy comparing her workplace to sharing a bedroom with siblings reminds me of Fine's (2000) writing on small schools, and her idea that if large schools can have the pathologies of prisons, so small schools can have the pathologies of families. When I

asked Charlotte if that intimacy translated into an especially close staff, she voiced some of the same contradictory feelings I had been experiencing.

> We are very close here but not close beyond these walls. I have outside school friendships with staff from the other outreach school nearby, but here we don't go out together maybe because we see each other enough during the day. You get a chance to know people, but in the in-school way as opposed to out of school, and people are very different outside than what they are in the school. I am comfortable with the way things are here; you can't be super-close friends with everybody. It would be the same thing with a spouse or a partner. You could be spending all your time with them and it wouldn't be healthy. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 38–40)

Just as the metaphors of team and family underscore much of Charlotte's reflections about her current teaching practice, my own understanding of teamwork and my own role as a team player has changed considerably since I began teaching at Storefront School. I grin as I share with her,

> I used to think that I was a team player but when I went to the outreach school I realized just how much of a team player I was *not* being. Because everything was so unfamiliar and therefore threatening, I started trying to define boundaries and territories and defend them with everything in my arsenal. It is humbling to realize these things, and have to do more accepting of others and be less demanding. Unfortunately, I found out that I am happiest as a team player when I get my own way. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 41–43)

Charlotte smirks at this statement, and only says, "I am, too!" This leads us to talking about autonomy and the freedoms inherent in the outreach school structure. She says,

> In teaching there is a lot of autonomy, and even more so in an outreach school. The autonomy here is way more than anything I thought I would ever experience. I don't really even feel influenced by the other teachers here because we are very separate in the way that we do things, like the way that we mark. There is nothing wrong with people in the same school having different expectations, and some of it is in the subject matter, too. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 41–43)

An understanding of the intimacy of the community of practice for educators is only possible when considered in the context of a professional practice that places students at the center of consideration. Students are a vital link in any outreach learning community because of the responsive nature of the outreach teacher's many roles.

Serve as a Counsellor First, Teacher Second: 'Memorable Student' Stories

Charlotte twirls the ring of her cola can around her finger pensively as we talk about our relationships with students.

> You can use adjectives from both ends of the spectrum to describe the possible relationships with kids here. You know, there's utmost respect and admiration on one end, and then there are the other kids at the other end where you just want to strangle them. I've got this one kid right now, who's doing remedial Math, but he's a brilliant, brilliant kid, and he knows that when he gets a certain amount of the module done, he'll pass the module. So that's all he does. It doesn't matter what course he's doing. He does the same thing in sciences, in humanities, the same thing. Just does the minimum. You just want to throttle him.
>
> I have tried to ask him why, but he just says he doesn't want to waste his time doing stupid work; he just has to get through. He's been kicked out of the house, and he has to pass this course to get back into the house. How do you support that? We've tried everything, even insisting he bring the module in and sit down and get it all finished here before it's handed in. Well then what he turns in is just blah, blah, blah, blah. I don't know, maybe he's now coming around because he just passed his last module and had more than his usual 50%, so I don't know. This kid responds a bit to me when I try to relate to him personally and try to counsel him, but not to all the people in this building.
>
> He had an altercation with one of the other staff members here and I just said to him, "So, what is this all about, where is this coming from?" He said, "Oh, I'm just playing with them because I'm the puppet master." The other teacher wanted to kick him out of here because he was so rude. I brought this kid in the back and I said, "I will go to bat for you on this one because I don't want to see you out of here. If you do this again, there's nothing I can do to stop it from happening." He hasn't done it again. Maybe I got through to him a little bit.
>
> I always hold out hope; you can't abandon all hope. This is the same kid who came in when somebody had smashed him one with a can of vegetable soup. He had to go for stitches and he wouldn't let anyone else come down to the clinic

> with him. He is hardcore. We know that he deals drugs; we know that he's on meth, and he has problems with his mom at home. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 11–14)

Charlotte's clear frustration combined with compassion for this student reminds me of the messiness of establishing relationships with students that go beyond the superficial. Ennis and McCauley report that "being *'in-relation'* with students…is a personal and emotional process that creates a web of trust" and note that this is a complex and risky endeavour that involves sustained and long-term interactions and internal levels of justice and fairness (2002, p. 152, italics in original). With this at-risk and potentially difficult student, Charlotte attempts to make him accountable without coercion, an approach advocated in Haberman's (1994) description of gentle teaching in a violent society.

Charlotte has many stories about her students to share, and these give me a better idea of what her daily life is like at Granville. She explains,

> About a year and a couple months ago I had another student who had just come back to us. She had taken a course through us the summer before, went back to the high school and subsequently moved out of home and in with her boyfriend. She and her boyfriend broke up and she moved back home pregnant. She didn't know how to deal with it, and I was the first person that she discussed it with. She came in one day and she said, "I need to talk to you." She was afraid to tell her parents.
>
> I counselled her through that, and I just kept on reinforcing that she needed to speak to her parents or at least one of her parents, that she'd be surprised at how supportive her parents were. We looked at different options for her and put into place a support system for people who she could contact to help her cope with whichever decision that she decided to make. Her dad was very sick too, so she didn't want to bring this up. She asked me, you know, "Please just don't tell anybody," and I didn't. It wasn't very hard at all because I don't believe it's my place to tell.
>
> She finally spoke to her parents and decided to terminate the pregnancy. I always told her, "Whatever you decide to do is what you decide to do and you

> need to think about what is best for you, what's best for the child". When she talked to her mom, her mom said the same sorts of things and she had already decided that she wanted to terminate because she knew that there was no way that she and her boyfriend were getting back together. She had wanted to go to university; now she wants to become a teacher.
>
> Even now I talk to this girl about it every once and a while, and I just ask her, "How are things going?" I can see sometimes that stress is really high for her. I've referred her to a community person to speak to because it's something that's always going to be there for her. At first, she said, "I just feel so relieved that it's gone". But, about six months later, there was this sense of loss and mourning that she hadn't dealt with. Then I came in with the message, "You need to deal with it or it'll be there for the rest of your life". She didn't recognize what was happening at the time in terms of the sense of loss being delayed. For me the experience was very hard. I felt such a huge sense of responsibility. This is a kid's life, right now, with her whole mental well being and future is dependent on this point and how it would affect her. I just felt such a huge responsibility.
>
> About a week before this started, we had received a procedural manual about how to deal with different types of issues that might come up as a counsellor in your school and this was one of the issues. When she first started to talk to me, of course, I hadn't read through the whole manual yet. I hadn't even looked at, but then I went to it after. What I was doing was exactly the way that had been detailed. It was a good thing that I had reacted the way that I had. The manual also took the stance that is always up to the student to make up her mind to tell the parents. If the parents ever found out that a teacher knew and didn't inform them, at least there's the support then from the board and the superintendent. You might still have to answer for it, but you could say, 'The policy of our school and school division is that it's ultimately up to the student to bring that sort of information to their parents.' Well, that's exactly how I felt about it. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 3–11)

Charlotte delivers this last statement with confidence, but I wonder if she felt as confident about her decision at the time. I know I would have agonized over it. The last section of Charlotte's story reveals both the rewarding aspects of offering guidance to a young person at a crucial juncture in her life, and illustrates the heavy responsibility of guiding well within a student's trust, at the same time as balancing responsibilities to other interested stakeholders such as parents or the school board.

Charlotte's approach to working with students comes from her attempts to enter the student's out of school reality.

> It's just common sense and compassion. Put yourself in that kid's shoes, how would you feel if you were this kid? Would you want a teacher calling your parents and telling them? That would undermine everything. I just kept on insisting that she really needed to tell her parents or at least one of her parents about what was going on. One of the most important things is that you need to be objective in order for other kids then to come and talk to you as well. These kids talk to each other. Maybe somebody said to her, 'Well if you have a problem, go talk to Charlotte, she's not going to judge you. Whatever you do is fine, but she's there to listen.' The kids do know, and that's why it's just so important to be able to accept the decisions that your kids make whether you agree or you disagree. (transcript, June 25, 2004, pp.7, 9)

Charlotte's statements reveal a teaching philosophy that acknowledges that students need to be in control of their own decisions and take responsibility for them, without teacher attempts to control, coerce or judge, advocated as an effective approach when working with students (Haberman, 1994; Housego, 1999).

There is a significant satisfaction for Charlotte in knowing that she has helped a student achieve her goals.

> The girl who had gotten pregnant was a full time student of ours this year. She invited me to her family barbeque for her graduation. I didn't have direct contact with the mom until everything was finished. But she came in one day, and she was almost in tears, she was just so happy that her daughter had had somebody with compassion to talk to, somebody to talk to quietly and who gently pushed her along so that she could resolve this situation. Her mom and I still talk quite a lot and I have really gotten to know the family as well. (transcript, June 25, 2004, p. 10)

Charlotte continued to respect the student's privacy by not establishing a relationship with the parents until they initiated it, even after the need for secrecy ended. In this way, she was able to protect the "inter-locking and multi-faceted strands of trust" (Ennis &

McCauley, 2002, p. 153) between her and this student. Charlotte concludes her story by saying,

> These are a couple of our kids that have had some troubles. With many other kids, building relationships depends on the way that they've been socialized, in turn how they socialize with us. We have some students who are from a very religious background and they're very smart, things are very stable at home, and they come in here and they don't say boo. If you can get them to join in a conversation it's like pulling teeth, they just find it very hard to come out of their skin. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, p. 14)

Our memorable student stories begin to reveal the range of students who attend outreach schools. Tymensen (2001) and others suggest that while outreach schools in Alberta were initially considered a place to educate marginalized and at-risk students, the "last, least and lost" (Bouska, 2001, p. 15), currently other students not well served by regular attendance based schools are joining the outreach. This may include students who must work to support themselves, parents, and students who have athletic or musical careers which preclude regular attendance (Fehlauer & Jorgensen, 2001; Van Slyke, 2001).

Charlotte offers a powerful metaphor to sum up her reflections on her relationships with students.

> Relationships with kids are like a beach where the waves are coming up and every time a wave comes, the sand underneath changes. I guess you can't pinpoint it. That's what it's like here, every time a student comes in, the reaction might be different depending what's happening the rest of their life, even if it's the same student as yesterday. They are adolescents and things are changing daily for them; one minute they are in love with everybody and the next the whole world sucks…We have to adapt to this as well just because of our closeness with working with kids. The tide comes in, and you don't know what is going to happen until that wave is gone. You can go from elation to frustration in the breath of 30 seconds. (transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 14, 16)

Charlotte's metaphor of the beach and the cyclical and tidal nature of students' dispositions have stayed with me. When I had difficulty articulating how difficult the task of teaching in the outreach school actually was, this metaphor gave me the words to show the true nature of the work when working one-on-one with students. If I thought of students as unpredictable as waves, I could then think about those days when I felt that the force of erosion was wearing on me.

Trust Within Charlotte's Pedagogical Practice

Charlotte's stories demonstrate the level of trust that can develop over time between students and teachers. Trust is generally acknowledged to be at the center of caring student/teacher relationships (Beattie, 1999; Craig, 1996; Ennis & McCauley, 2002; Krall & Jalongo, 1998/1999) and this anecdote serves to represent the core of trust in Charlotte's interactions with her students. She knows that to foster trust she will have to be non-judgmental and have a deep understanding of this child's individual needs, two key aspects of trust (Beattie, 1999). She clearly articulates an awareness of both the organic and dynamic nature of relationship-building, and has a deep awareness that the stability of the student/teacher relationship is dependent of the context of a students' whole lifeworld, something that school researchers consider essential to good teaching (Dempsey, 1994). As Krall and Jalongo (1998/1999, p. 83) note, "children bring home to school as easily as they tote their backpacks and lunches." Charlotte understands that if she wishes to be effective both as a subject teacher and a model for how to live a life, she has to be willing to grant students their own locus of control, an imperative for at-risk

youth (Conrath, 2001; Ennis & McCauley, 2002). This wisdom, allowed to realize itself in the outreach school community, is at the center of Charlotte's approach to fostering authentic relationships with students.

Renegotiating Boundaries

The intimate quality and texture of the student/teacher relationship that is described in the previous anecdotes is something that grows out of the one on one nature of the teaching situation in the outreach school. A levelled power differential is another aspect of the student teacher relationship that is also affected by the altered parameters of the outreach school, and an important element when working with disenfranchised youth (Beattie, 1999; Haberman, 1994; Housego, 1999). Even in early interaction, the positioning of the teacher and student is different because the institutional structure, so pervasive in regular school, with its rigid control over students' use of time and place, can no longer be used to ensure obedience. In its place can grow a relationship of mutual regard, and this often occurs based on the way that students and teachers spend time together in a social atmosphere that allows them to renegotiate their old roles in a way that attends to the needs of the individual. When Charlotte and I approached this topic, she made these observations.

> The more you talk to somebody the more you know that person and the dynamic shifts a lot. Sometimes it takes a long time to find out with each individual kid what is going to make them tick. They don't always disclose right away, but for the most part eventually they come out with what is going on in their life. The longer we have a student, they more we know about them, and the relationships build with time. The students that have been with us a long time and have relationships with us tend to get away with a few more things. Once you establish

> a relationship and get to know the ins and outs of the kid then you know where the boundaries are with that person. (transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 16–17)

Charlotte's awareness of the nature of her relationships with her students echoes numerous writings indicating that time and students' perception of teachers' interest are important ingredients in a student/teacher relationship (Deiro, 1995; Tebben, 1995; Testerman, 1996; Dempsey, 1994). Craig (1996) even suggests that the word *relationship* should not be considered a noun but a verb, to honour the ongoing nature of relationship development.

The notion of teachers striving to understand their students' boundaries is an inversion of the typical student's role of finding out about the teacher's likes and dislikes, points of pleasure and intolerance. It is an important concept considering the mutually negotiated aspect of the relationship. It is as much in teachers' best interests as it is the students that students come in for help, stay on schedule and complete the coursework. Recall that during the first evening visit to Granville, the conversation centered on the tension between caring for students' intellectual and emotional welfare, and the need to balance the budget through completion credit funding. For Charlotte, punitive response available to teachers on a formal level is limited to students' removal from a course or program, which nullifies any investment of time and energy the student *and* the teacher have already committed. This and any other consequential responses for infractions could injure the fragile personal relationship that takes a long time to develop strength. Given the parameters of her outreach school, a negative or punitive response is rarely constructive in the intended sense. As many of these students are already early school

leavers, too much difficulty at an outreach school can induce a second school leaving. In this scenario, the best way for a teacher to negotiate a successful relationship is through motivation, and later, relational obligation. In conversation, Charlotte finds this topic a source of some amusement for her.

> It's Don's first year here and sometimes the kids really know how to push his buttons in order to get him defensive. It's a bit hilarious to watch but I shouldn't laugh. He is a very good disciplinarian, but those skills just aren't that useful here. You need to know when to let go. If you don't, that is when you get the whole situation starting.
>
> I chuckle upon hearing this, thinking about my own difficult first year. I reply, When I was new I was feeling really insecure because I was out of my element and in water way over my head, so I often went back to my safest position. When you are a classroom teacher, this is a big part of your identity, and when you walk into an outreach centre, all those great skills you have in your toolbox are useless. I knew when to use humour, I knew when to be strict…
>
> Charlotte interrupts, laughing, Yes, but you need to know the kids *here* in order to do that, because you don't talk to every kid in the same way. For some kids, if you start using humour with them, you've lost them for the whole day. Your "toolbox"? You just leave it in the trunk! (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, pp. 74–75)

In this conversation, I became aware of something I had not previously been able to put words to: perhaps generic classroom strategies for dealing with kids hold them at arm's length. The milieu of the outreach school calls for an educator to give up known 'techniques' to a certain extent, and be willing to just *be* with a student. Dempsey (1994, p. 103) suggests that much of teachers' knowledge "originates, develops and emerges in the context of the experiences students and teachers share" and suggests this may be the truly important knowledge produced in good teaching. If the knowledge that is important to teaching can be seen in the way in which students and teachers alike set about forming

relationships, perhaps it can also be seen in the way they engage in community-making practices.

Developing Relationships in a Community of Place

When I first entered the outreach community, I had a perception that students would suffer from not learning in groups, from a lack of socialization. It wasn't until I was asked to teach the learning strategies courses that I learned alongside my students about their individual learning styles. Then the light bulb went on: some kids learn best in self-imposed isolation. I became aware that while my students did the bulk of their course work at home, they could and would form informal study groups and friendships when they needed too.

One such group called themselves the Thursday Backroom group. A group of eight or so of my students would commandeer the backroom in the west wing of our school, spread out the snacks for sharing and settle down to chat, joke and pour over their work. Because I taught all of them English throughout their high school years, I made it a habit to wander back and join in for a few minutes at a time often throughout the day. It formed a venue for some really great group discussions on the nature of life and man, through our study of literature. (reconstructed from personal practice journal, April 19, 2004) Charlotte notes that a similar community of time and place can grow in her outreach setting as well.

> With students who come in, like our Wednesday and Thursday night regulars who are always here, there is some great joking around that goes on. They know each other. They come to take part and they get a greater informality, a better

> relationship. When the kids do that work here we get to know them, too. You can't get to know somebody who is not there. (transcript, June 25, 2004, p. 18)

This statement reminds me of a banner I used to have in my drama room which read, "In drama, as in life, the more you put into it, the more you will get out of it." I think this statement can be modified to fit many situations, and especially this context. In Charlotte's statement, the notion of work refers both to the coursework, but also the personal work of reaching out to others. However, part of that work is to respect other's boundaries and our own.

While she is much more accessible personally than is typical for a high school teacher, Charlotte remains aware of her professional demeanour at all times. For example, she is embarrassed when she slips up with a casual curse. She immediately contributes a quarter to the swear jar to honour one of the few explicit rules at Granville Learning Centre, noting that she is "not above reproach or retribution". There are other times when she must hold her tongue as well, and this is a point of pondering for me. Charlotte smiles as she explains,

> Everything is just so open here, there are very few boundaries, but I find it very hard to keep my tongue when kids come in here and they are talking about Ralph Klein or something. The biggest boundary for me is not disclosing to kids my political views, my religious views, that sort of thing. It is really important that kids come up with their own ideas. It is much harder here than in a regular classroom to squash that kind of conversation. Any way you try to redirect the conversation seems artificial, because you are there and they are there and it appears to them you have all the time in the world. Especially if the student is there all day on a slow day, they will ask, "Why can't you talk to me?" Sometimes we just have to say, "That is not appropriate for here."
>
> Charlotte's explanation triggers for me a realization about my own school practice, and I tell her the story of my student Dustin.
>
> You know, that reminds me of one of my Grade 12 English students. This student comes in and he is just this amazing anarchist, pierced everything. He's

> super bright and he's thought his life through and he has his reasons for the way he is, and I respect that. However, he also uses profane language in casual conversation with me. I really don't care because he uses it to express himself clearly, but on the other hand I am a teacher and I think about what my response would have to be in the classroom. Now, none of that has to matter. So I am watching this kid as he is so free with his language and I am wondering what boundaries are being respected and attended to here, his, mine or the institutions, I don't know what the answer to that is. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 20–21)

I find myself wondering whose boundaries are being invoked here. On first thought, his swearing might seem disrespectful, until I acknowledge that for this student, swearing freely is likely a symbol of how comfortable he feels to discuss the progress of his punk band, and argue about the relative merits of Stephen King's writing style. I am allowed into the inner circle of his language, where I have even picked up new punk music slang. It is the way he speaks naturally. I hesitate to address this with him more than casually, in a half-joking reprimand, because it seems like a bit of pretentious line drawing in a rich and authentic relationship, especially as I am not sure whether my discomfort comes from my own personal and professional boundaries or some need to adhere to a boundary long instilled in my version of 'teacher'. There are subtle ways to ensure students are accountable for their behaviour, and these have much more to do with the informal expectations of the community than the formal rules. As an example, Charlotte tells about the swear jar.

> We have a swear jar, and usually it works fine. Rarely a student doesn't want to contribute, so we tell them to borrow, or to bring it tomorrow, or have them write an IOU and remind them a lot. By having teachers also contribute when we slip sends a really strong message that it is not just for kids it is for everybody. We are all on equal footing here, kids call us by our first names and things are much more open and relaxed. Right or not it is the reality of what we live with in an outreach school. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 23–24)

Many of the previous anecdotes told between Charlotte and I suggest that one way to function as a teacher in students' lives is to be responsive to students' needs. Her stance on student teacher relationships is a significant revision of the stance of the typical high school teacher, where conventional wisdom holds that you should run a tight ship and set the boundaries early and firmly.

Reflections on Growth and Beyond

I know the experience of teaching in an outreach school has changed the foundation of my approach toward teaching and relating to students in ways that will only become fully apparent to me far in the future. When I ask Charlotte about whether she has changed much as a teacher since coming to the outreach school, Charlotte replies,

> My idea of the essence of a teacher has changed. Knowledge of a subject is important but it certainly takes back seat to everything else about you as a person and how you relate to kids. That is just so much more important that anything you could ever know to teach knowledge-wise. What I have learned here is so much about kids and what makes them tick, the valuing of a kid for the kid's sake, and not putting them into one basket. Just because they're in one classroom does not mean that they are all the same. I still don't know how I would ever impress upon pre-service teachers how important that is, especially in math because it's just not something that is commonly valued by math teachers. You can't take the math lobe out of somebody's brain and teach it math and then stick it back in the person. Math has got to become more humanized. I've always tried to teach my kids that there's more than one way to come to an answer. Math all depends on the context.
>
> And if you had to go back in into the classroom? I interject.
>
> If I had to go back into a classroom tomorrow, I would place a lot more emphasis on my students. I think I have always been trying to do that, always thought that I gave my kids the benefit of the doubt, but now I know *how* to give my kids the benefit of the doubt.
>
> You thought you were flexible until you actually bent over? I suggest.

> Yeah! Another thing I would do differently in the classroom is have a lot more contact with parents, and not be intimidated by parents in ways that I have before. We're all just people, it's not us and them, and if you can't work with those parents, you can't do diddley squat! I hope to see that as a part of a chapter heading in your writing, 'You don't know diddley squat!' I think we often feel like we are just stumbling around. But I have always been able to cope somehow, find the answers, and I am not uncomfortable telling my students that I don't know the answer but I will do some research and find out. Not a lot has changed. I have always seen myself as having a ton of different things to teach. I still do and I still struggle to feel competent with all these different courses, but I will muddle my way through somehow. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 52–56)

The statement "You don't know diddley squat!" makes me laugh, partly because it is so colloquial, partly because it has a sort of a ringing smack to it, reflecting a dual joy and bewilderment I sometimes experience which echoes the realization that by engaging in teaching in an outreach school, I am also revising many of my assumptions about student/teacher relationships and the shape of those relationships in the context of the learning community.

Being Content

There are two ideas that surface regularly in Charlotte's speech; one is her great satisfaction with her job, and the other I will only describe here as a sense of 'being' in place in a way that satisfies her own sense of who she is. A sense of identity is multi-faceted and her comments reflect her awareness of being engaged with tasks and being engaged with students in a way that is affirming.

Several times throughout our conversations, Charlotte voices the notion that her life is busy, even at times overwhelmingly so. Early on she observes, "We spend all of

our lives working, working, working and we need to say no. No is something that is coming into my vocabulary now." Later, speaking of her classroom teaching experience, she notes, "It was just crazy. But that is just the way my life seems to be. I'm just doing so many things at the same time" (researcher journal, June 13, 2004). The present tense of this statement suggests that while the setting has changed, the busyness has not.

However, the sense of being busy with labour seems to disappear when Charlotte's talks about her sense of being with students. When I asked about spending over an hour helping one student, Charlotte claimed she did not feel a need to hurry. Another day she wishes aloud that she could tell her colleagues, "The only things that really bother me here are interruptions such as the phone. When I am working with a student, just take a message. Don't interrupt me to tell me that someone needs me on the phone" (transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 51). Being with students is a place that Charlotte tries to keep removed from the multi-tasking nature of her job and the busyness of the rest of her time.

While sharing stories of counselling students in trouble, I ask her if she views that as being a large part of her teaching role. While the notion of role has been bandied between us previously about other aspects of her work, it is not a word she uses in relation to her students.

> I don't see being a life coach or a mentor as a role, I see that as me being me. It's just one of those intrinsic things and I can't take it away from who I am. I just try to be open to the kids.
>
> When asked how she would change being an outreach teacher, Charlotte asserts, I don't know any other way to live it than the way I do. As far as the way that I teach, the way that I am with the kids, I don't think that I could do it any differently because I am who I am and it really comes for me and my position

> here. This really fits for me, much more so than a regular classroom where you can't allow as much of yourself to come out. I don't know why anybody would want to work anywhere else but here because the latitude we have here is incredible. I've just had such a sense of fulfillment that I've never had before. (reconstructed from transcript, June, 11, pp. 83–85)

Charlotte's comments here and throughout our conversations regarding her reasons for satisfaction reflect that of many teachers in research texts: the ability to be creative, close collegial relationships, and responsiveness from students (Dempsey, 1994). Charlotte's sense of being in a place that somehow "fits" comes through in a discussion of re-languaging our practice.

> When I started saying 'I have to go to work' rather than 'I have to go to school' I knew that I was in a bad place. But I am not coming to work or school anymore, I am coming to Granville. Charlotte grimaces a bit as she recalls this point in her teaching. I reply,
>
> Thanks for pointing that out because I noticed that in my first year I felt the need to change my language. Where I was going each day didn't fit my concept of school or of work. I knew that learning was going on, but it just didn't fit with my notion of schooling. I started telling my husband, 'I'm going to Storefront. See you at five o'clock', rather than saying after-school, because I didn't have words that fit anywhere for me.
>
> Well, for me it isn't because it's uncomfortable calling it school, it is a school. But it doesn't even feel…it's just such a wonderful place to be that it's not even related to anything of my past vocabulary. (reconstructed from transcript, June 25, 2004, pp. 9–11)

In her last statement, Charlotte's contentment is clear.

There is a sense of contentment that pervades Granville; there is no complacency in it, but rather a sense of something precious and out of time. The days that I spend there are invariably calm and peaceful, uneventful and drama-free. The atmosphere is hushed, with the sense of a contemplative sanctuary. This is not to refute the busyness that

Charlotte feels, but only to observe that staff members do not allow their own task-awareness to alter the serenity I noticed on the first day I came to visit.

Saying Goodbye to Granville Learning Centre

The end of June is a bittersweet time for me, always has been. Here lingers the fragrant remembrance of bringing my own teachers peonies from my mother's garden on the half-blessed and twice cursed report card pick up day. Here lie 15 years of saying goodbye to students whom I have loved and who have loved me, but are suddenly eager to be free, taking flight like so many birds, leaving me with the kind of sorrow best ameliorated by cleaning up and planning for next year. June is always the in-between time, when I am still in school, soon to be replaced by a time of being out of school. It was in this time and headspace that I concluded my visits to Granville Learning Centre.

Charlotte did not seem as aware of the old ritual of summer holidays, and perhaps that is because she had chosen to work the summer term. For her, it is both the ending of a term and the beginning of their busiest season at Granville. Instead of the quiet and forlorn places that schools tend to become in late June, I found the place humming with preparations in the lull before the summer storm. However, her work did not stop Charlotte and me from engaging in end of the year reflections.

> I find my job here far more fulfilling than when I was in the classroom. I can see the impact that I am having on kids. It is not that I really need that external motivation, but man is it ever nice to finally see it! Everyone tells me, 'you will never see it 'pay forward.' You will never see the good that is happening but maybe one day this kid is going to come up to you out of the blue'. Well, they come up to you out of the blue here, and you don't have to wait 10 years.

> Like this fellow who was leaving here earlier. I was watching him and he was kind of lingering and he said thank you three times. 'Well, thank you,' he said, 'Ok, well, see you, and thank you.' It was as if he was trying to find some way to really say 'goodbye and this has been good for me' but he couldn't quite find the right words.
>
> What is so neat is that they can and do say thank you, because when they walk out of your classroom in the big school they don't always say thank you. (reconstructed from transcript, June 11, 2004, p. 71–72)

As I collect my things to go, I am reminded of Ellis' idea that a place evolves through the building up of stories about what has happened there, that it is more than just walls and furniture but rather "the whole experience that results from the way people inhabit it, and how they inhabit it is influenced by identities they have already created in other places" (2005, p. 58). The image of the young man trying to say 'goodbye, this has been good' stays with me as I drive home over the fields green with ripening grain. I, too, have said goodbye to the place and staff of Granville, and I can understand the young man's loss of words.

Reflections on Charlotte and Granville Learning Centre

The journey toward an understanding of Charlotte's experiences of pedagogical relationships and a sense of community occurred within a hermeneutic fusion of horizons in which we used "routine conversation" (Smith, 1993) to encounter the "dialogical, intersubjective and conversational nature of human experience" (Smith, 1991, p. 192). Together, through our conversations and discussion of artefacts and time charts, we tried to build a "meaning…brought into being through the act of understanding" (Smith, 1993, p. 195). While I consciously sought to confirm my understandings of Charlotte's spoken

text through a "playing back and forth between the specific and the general" (Smith, 1991, p. 190), I also sought to understand the whole of Charlotte's experience through observation of her actions and interactions with others in her environment. These observations, in the form of field notes and descriptions, became part of our confirmatory process and added to our "mutual understanding of the meaning and intentions that (stood) behind each other's expressions" (Smith, 1993, p. 198). Through our conversations, much of the interaction of stories happened "spontaneously and without prompting" (Conle, 1996, p. 302).

Charlotte's concern for time did provide some limitations on the inquiry. Although she was clearly interested in and valued the inquiry, after her responses to the initial field notes and transcripts, she chose to limit her interaction with interim and final texts to reading for confirmation. After one year into the inquiry, she moved south and returned to the traditional high school in a leadership position. As a result, her time to devote to the project became even scarcer. However, this is no surprise considering the zest with which she seemed to approach everything: she constantly felt she had too much on her plate, but had trouble saying no to the many undertakings that interested her.

The bulk, although not all, of our interactions took place at Granville Learning Centre, a place that came to represent a kind of educational 'cocoon' for Charlotte. This phrase provoked a resonating metaphorical connection (Conle, 1996), as I could also see myself in a process of *becoming*, much as is suggested in the metaphor. Because of its intimate size and ambience, and the autonomy the setting provided, it was evident to me why Charlotte was so comfortable at Granville. However, we did not begin our

conversations there, but started in a borrowed office, a neutral location. At the other end of the inquiry, a catch-up social visit occurred in Charlotte's new home among her family. Although I believe that Charlotte responded to and consciously used spaces to communicate a story of herself within relationships, both in the research relationship and in the school context, the concept of place as physicality did not enter many of our conversations. Although she did not speak of an attachment to places, Charlotte's strongest sense of community came from the relationships that happened within those places.

Charlotte's emphasis on the importance of the relational can be seen in her fond retelling of special students in her memory, in her frustrated isolation from the greater community of practice, in her generous attempts to understand her immediate colleagues and to value their contributions, and in her valuation of building a strong network of supporters within the local community. For her, community means people and dialogue, and she brought this willingness into the inquiry. In our early relationship, we both found ourselves orienting ourselves uncertainly into roles in the inquiry. She was conscious of trying to shed her recent role as a researcher while I was still trying to find myself as a researcher. We also had two very different styles of conversing that, without conscious effort and awareness, could have been uncomfortable. However, despite our differences and some small initial awkwardness, there was narrative resonance in our life stories, in our orientation toward our professional lives, and in our pursuit of other educational projects. As much as we are so different, we remain able to understand and value the perspectives of one another.

In the following chapter, I tie together some of the narrative threads that have been spun in the process of inquiring within Granville Learning Centre and Rosedale Outreach School. I will offer some analysis of themes that surface within the texts of Ron and Charlotte's teaching lives, in the context of my own knowledge and through the lens of some theoretical and practical perspectives.

Chapter Six

Finding a Teaching Story to Live By

The story of public schooling is an old story with a solid foundation. Although it has many variations, they are all well polished and seemingly immutable. I do not refer to the story of curriculum documents, mission statements, and writers on school reform, but to the story of textbooks with thrice repaired bindings, locker romances, and desks in rows; a lifeworld for students and educators that is essentially recognizable to people one and even two generations removed from school. Though my colleagues from the classroom place and I sometimes tell a story of rapid and, in many cases, unwelcome change in schools over the past 15 years, I must admit that from my dual perspective, much more seems to have remained the same than has changed. Possibly, the structure of the school itself is not *fitting* within the world so well anymore and the change we perceive is the pinching discomfort of this realization.

In contrast to the traditional narrative of public schooling, the story of outreach is a young story, one that is unsure and still in the process of authoring itself. In the conversations I have had in the three outreach schools that I have known, outreach teachers do not feel beleaguered by either the pace or scope of educational change. Instead, like Ron and Charlotte, they see themselves as acting upon their world, as agents within a learning community that is ever growing and changing, and responsive to their efforts to shape it.

Among other elements, the word community connotes a group, others and self, dynamic culture, some organization, perhaps traditions and rituals. These are aspects of

most schools, but with a shift in the practices of time, space, and relational context, I wondered how outreach teachers might tell the story of community. My initial question was a matter of curiosity that took on extra relevance when I found myself teaching in an outreach school. At Rosedale and Granville, and at my own worksite, my experiences have revealed to me the richness of community in an educational landscape that I once imagined barren. Previous to this study, the word community carried with it certain assumptions for me based on my own experiences in school as a child and as a classroom teacher. One of these assumptions was that experiences of community would be predominantly focused on the group: group interaction, group values, norms and beliefs, and even group conflict.

But as a result of my experience in outreach schools and this research, I have come to think of school communities differently. I now imagine them as a multiplicity; as places where individuals can be part of a community in a variety of ways which may include both participation and withdrawal and where the experiences of community are just as likely to be in the singular or in dyad form rather than the group form. My friend, the poet Brian Chan, tells me that we are always having relationships with people and places even when they are not in our presence. I recall Caragata's (1998) metaphor of the village well. At the village well, you might approach to have chat with a neighbour or two, and these instances would perhaps be more frequent and arising spontaneously than the more formal and orchestrated events that would include a group, or the whole community. So it is with the interactions described by Charlotte and Ron. Neither of them focused on anecdotes that featured groups, the emphasis was more on one-on-one

relationships, and how each discovered themselves as possessing agency within these relationships. I think this is an important distinction, a revision of my assumptions that is underscored throughout the following comments. In this chapter, I want to direct the reader's attention towards what I have learned from living and researching in outreach schools and to try to lay these personal perspectives alongside the work of other writers.

It is not difficult to imagine outreach schools as schools with few antecedents. These are places where stories and assumptions are still in the first generation, where outreach educators find themselves pioneering on a new landscape. In the midst of uncertainty, these outreach educators become co-architects in the school community. Part of this architecture may be deliberate place-making, as a place for community, and as an expression of the values of the community. Within this place and in the interstitial places where the outreach community overlaps into others, educators may take on informal leadership in many ways, including mentoring, active advocacy, and ambassadorship. In the stories of these outreach school teachers, good teaching has less to do with subject knowledge, *management* of students or teaching technique, and more to do with *being* an educator and dialoguing with oneself about the ethics of teaching practice. It is through the ongoing articulation of their own engagement in shaping a teaching identity that these educators tell a new story of educating students that transform the school community even as they themselves are transformed by their teaching practice.

Few Antecedents

As a community in formation, there are few antecedents that can offer an outreach learning community a comfortable framework. One might think that outreach schools could operate as an auxiliary of the regular school and graft themselves to the typical school system through an adaptation of the metanarratives of school. Some outreach schools are designed by policymakers in just this way. However, I have seen many parents, students, and even educators engage the outreach school from a place of disillusionment with the regular school system. Each of these members arrives with his or her story of how the regular school did not meet their needs and the stories are as individual as the tellers. The commonality they share is they have chosen to leave an institution so embedded in our understanding of childhood it is often unquestioned. For this reason, the story of the one-size fits all school (Raywid, 2001) does not seem to provide an appropriate starting point for the outreach school. Subtle antagonism exists toward mainstream schooling in some outreach schools, much in the way a cultural minority group braces themselves against trespass by the majority. Consequently, the outreach community is obliged to form from a starting point that is largely without antecedents. It is this quality that has helped outreach learning communities discover their own stories

Teaching as Architecture

Community is shaped through many forces; by the telling, symbols, traditions, and rituals of the community (Deal & Peterson, 1999). However, the story of outreach

schools continues to be under revision. The breadth of styles and structures in program delivery models is an example of this. Some outreach schools are attendance based, or not, some have small groups of students, or individually conducted relationships. Granville Learning Centre is a storefront styled school that had the feel of a mom and pop corner store. Charlotte and Don, with the sometimes assistance of June and Robert, ran a school responsive to the changing clientele and the surrounding community. Rosedale Outreach School had undergone significant program and philosophical restructuring only 4 years into operation, in response to success rates and the concerned perceptions of the local and professional community. The staff deliberately created a place to serve the needs of at-risk and disenfranchised youth in a multi-use site at the heart of the community.

My own Storefront School started in a bay in a local mall with two teachers and one support person, but moved to a large suite of well-appointed rooms and grew to a staff of 16. In my 3 years working there, we would revise programs, policy, practices, and sometimes even purposes mid-year, often more than once, as we tweaked here and there, trying to find a design that worked. If I longed for certainty and status quo I should not have looked for it in the outreach school, but I found ample opportunity to develop innovation and accept leadership.

It may be helpful to think about Ron and Charlotte's relationships within their learning communities using architecture as a metaphor. Much the same way that a good architect will adjust the design of a house to accommodate site influences, these are educators who are simultaneously living in, designing, building, and renovating

pedagogical relationships and physical spaces: architecture in progress, inspirited by a deep commitment to serving the needs of students. Of course, for every architect there are external regulations to be observed and these considerations were often the most noticeable restrictions on the process of outreach community development in the three outreach schools. Often, in my own practice and in the musings of Charlotte and Ron, there is the sense that the rules and regulations that govern school operation are infused with assumptions that are, for the most part, incongruent with the lived experience, purposes, and aims of outreach school members. Among outreach school educators and the families that are served by them, there is a sense of being governed by policymakers that do not truly understand the nature of the outreach school. Ron, Charlotte, and I experienced parents, students, and other educators who perceived the institution of school as one that had relegated them to the margins. Perhaps this is one of the commonalities shared by outreach communities, this sense of trying to find a way to negotiate a design that meets the needs of the immediate members and other stakeholders.

Living Uncertainly

I suggested earlier that the word community connotes a group, others, and self, dynamic culture, traditions, and rituals. Often, a newcomer entering a school community can take for granted that many of these elements will be established. A newcomer's typical role is to listen to the language, learn the rituals and find a niche that they can comfortably inhabit. However, these things that traditionally form the foundation of the established school community are under revision within each outreach learning

community. Enculturation is not readily accomplished in an outreach community because little else is firmly established other than an unwillingness to accept the narrative of the dominant school culture without first trying to tailor the design more appropriately to a shifting context. Housego (1999, p. 90) notes that in an effort to address the needs of students "outreach teachers themselves made profound role changes . . . teachers themselves had to abandon the traditional teacher role and become nonjudgmental and neither coercive nor punitive." These teachers "acknowledged their own limitations (in assisting student success) and rather than blaming others, they tended to take ownership of problems and pursue solutions" (Housego, p. 91). In a place where the traditional teacher role of authority has been overthrown in favour of a process of ad hoc implementation, reflection, and revision, it is a challenge for teachers to remain centered and certain. This lends itself to a community in which all members have comparable voice and power rather than one in which the teacher has a privileged position of decision making.

There are many interrelated communities that inform and influence Rosedale and Granville, as well as Storefront. There are smaller communities within the school, such as groups of members like staff and parents, and there are larger communities, such as the school division, the outreach educators' specialist council, and the larger teaching community, in addition to the local community. I imagine these communities in an image of the ever-increasing rings that flow outward after the stone is dropped into the pond. As noted in chapter two of this work, many teachers are people who have never left school and their experiences as students in the public education system and later in their pre-

service training are unlikely to fundamentally challenge our society's story of what it is to be a teacher. However, Charlotte, Ron, myself, and perhaps other outreach teachers must negotiate an identity for him or herself within these expanding rings of community in a way that accounts for the internalized metanarrative of teaching, but that also accounts for his or her lived reality. It is in the liminal space of personal dissonance and the negotiation of professional identity that outreach teachers sometimes exist.

The teachers in this study have voiced the sense of having felt uncertain about acceptance within the borders of the teaching profession. Charlotte chooses not to accept speaking engagements for which she feels she might no longer be qualified despite her impressive accomplishments; Ron tells a story of receiving commendation from his peers for his innovative assessment practices, but it is intermingled with the sense of not being valued by his central office administration. I recall taking a whole series of positions in my first year at Storefront designed to protect my reputation as a rigorous teacher. Yet each of us has a strong sense of ourselves as outreach teachers and members of our learning communities as well as members of the profession. We tell insider stories among ourselves and we make it a central part of our teaching life to engage in re-storying with those around us through helping the greater professional community understand the outreach school and through helping students re-imagine themselves as successful learners.

Place-Making

One of the community-shaping tasks that outreach educators engage in is place-making; creating a place with an ambient quality that differs markedly from the traditional school and yet can fulfill some of its same functions. Place-making can be seen as a potent pedagogical consideration (Deal & Petersen, 1999; Evans, 1999), and one that is symbolic of a redefined educational philosophy. I recall the care taken to create sanctuary places in Rosedale and Ron's classroom and the casual sociality of Charlotte's relationships with her students at Granville. While the aesthetic quality of a place is an important consideration, of equal importance is the way that people interact in and with a place. Salzman (1995, p. 8) asserts, "whether a landscape is bleak or beautiful, it doesn't mean anything to me until a person walks into it, and then what interest me is how the person behaves in that place." The place of outreach is of fundamental importance to a re-negotiated student/teacher relationship, a relationship that in the outreach school is more likely to resemble one of advisor/advisee or a mentorship, rather than a hierarchical relationship based in power and obedience. The carefully considered place of outreach schools supports relationships that are less informed by issues of power and that encourage all members to take ownership of this place of community. If status can be considered a liability in establishing a healthy relational balance, then collaborative place-making and place-appropriating among teachers and students is a declaration of the values of the outreach learning community.

The place of the outreach learning community becomes a commonplace for educators, students, and their families, for dialogue and deliberation. It was interesting to

note that in all three outreach schools, unscheduled parent visits were common and that siblings often visited. This commonplace, this village well, is important because it can become the site of transformation for many of its members, a visible testament to the *unschooling* that teachers and students can experience. Certainly, I have heard a sense of relief at being freed of the bondage of the school place from students, and this is reflected in Charlotte's comments about time. This commonplace communicates that people are important, individuals will be acknowledged, and there are fewer barriers to access. These are values which are in part a direct product of the changing philosophies of the educators intimately involved with the place. The place of the outreach school can also become a pronouncement by the school division and the local community of the value conferred upon the program and the importance of meeting the needs of students who require something different. It declares a value and recognition of the needs of many kinds of students.

Leadership as an Embodiment of Practice

Teacher leadership is an important aspect of a learning community that eschews top-down decision making. In conversations with Ron and Charlotte, I noticed a distinct absence of storytelling about school administration, particularly an absence of talk that reveals a sense of powerlessness on the part of staff. Instead what I saw was a willingness of staff members to assume informal leadership as needed. Both Ron and Charlotte act as diplomatic ambassadors for their schools in their work with professional development and in their work within the community. I am thinking here of Ron's willingness to

engage visitors to the school and Charlotte's work with drug education in the community. Considering the range of their involvements, it is interesting to note that their leadership goes beyond their formally schooled areas in teaching and subject matter. In schools, the enacting of community-building events often falls to teachers: they are called upon in the making and maintenance of school culture. Charlotte and Ron's advocacy of their programs is often extemporized and yet is symbolic of the commitment they feel to their communities. Perhaps the renegotiation of a teacher identity within an outreach context has encouraged these teachers to willingly take on more active leadership.

Teaching as a Moral Engagement

Running like a bright ribbon throughout my conversations with Ron and Charlotte are statements that suggest the central consideration for these educators is just as likely to be moral as curricular or pedagogical. The obligation to *do the right thing* for a student and an awareness of their fiduciary responsibility towards their students is a central and recurring theme in their retelling of their outreach practice, and this awareness emphasizes the relational trust that characterizes their relationships with their students. Palmer (1997) suggests that "good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher . . . to connect (students) with the subject, depends less on the methods that I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my self-hood and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning" (p. 3). The willingness to be vulnerable in Charlotte's retelling of her actions when working with a surly Math student and a pregnant young woman sit beside Ron's attempts to motivate and support students

who are struggling to cope with substance abuse issues and dysfunctional families. In these stories, I see educators who recognize that for adolescents, learning is not only about the Alberta approved curriculum, but the curriculum that life provides for them and that powerful teaching and learning can occur when these two are intertwined. This is a pedagogical awareness that is valued by the outreach learning community. I am reminded of Aoki's understanding of a "multiplicity of lived curricula" (1993, p. 258) and like Aoki, in my immersion into the outreach school, I found myself in "sites of openness between and among the multitude of curricula that grace the landscape" (p. 267). When I remember my first year at Storefront School, I see now that the stories that were told to me as a newcomer were stories that asked me to reconsider how I recognized learning and the knowledge worth having. How might I re-imagine success for my students, from a success based in the acquisition of a diploma, the result of favourable performance on standardized tests, to a success that could be developed, articulated, and owned by a student? This is part of the moral engagement of outreach educators. These fledgling stories can be seen to be part of a story that members in outreach schools tell for themselves in the larger educational world.

Being a Teacher in an Outreach School

In his short story, "One Good Story, that One," Thomas King (1993) tells of an Aboriginal man who is asked by his friend to tell a story, in the old Indian tradition, to a group of White ethnographers. After several attempts to tell stories that will describe his own world, which are interrupted and rejected, he begins telling a version of the creation

of the world. This is a story rooted in hybridity. It features a man and a woman "Ah, Damn" and "Evening" and tells a creation story in which Ah, Damn becomes distracted with the exhaustive task of naming all of the animals. Coyote the trickster comes by and announces his name "four, maybe eight times." Meanwhile, a very curious Evening is eating the juicy mee-so from a tree of food, accompanied by Ju-poo-pea, the snake. At the end, Ah, Damn and Evening are tossed out of Evening's Garden for not being respectful and obedient, leaving an angry god, who is a White man, and the snake. At the end storyteller's voice returns.

> Boy, my friend says, better get some more tea. One good story, that one, my friend Napiao says.
>
> Those men push their tape recorders, they fix their cameras. All of those smile. Nod their head around. Look out window. Shake my hand. Make happy noises. Say goodbyes, see you later. Leave pretty quick.
>
> We watch them go. My friend, Napiao, puts the pot on for some tea. I clean up all the coyote tracks on the floor. (p. 10)

This story has echoes of Lugones' (1987) *playfulness* in the worlds in which she re-creates herself. Through the archetypal trickster figure of Coyote, the storyteller comments on a hybrid nature of identity and recognition from a culturally liminal space. I see Charlotte, Ron, and myself acting as storytellers, taking parts from here, from there, to fashion a conceivable story of teaching and a learning community, and doing so in a way that engages us in a form of playful re-creation. In this sense, our teaching has to do with a community-making that is as much self-naming. Our playfulness has in part to do with the telling of the outreach school story, the naming of it, in a way that will allow us to be at once ourselves and accepted within the metanarrative of teaching. Within this image is the tension between being and identity, how we imagine ourselves to be. Aoki

(1993, p. 260) suggests that increasingly we are being asked to reconsider identity, "to consider identity not so much as some*thing* already present, but rather as production, in the throes of being constituted as we live in places of difference." I can see outreach teachers as living in places of difference, both in degree and in kind (Aoki, 1993).

Packer and Goicoechea (2000) explore the ideas of a nondualist ontology in their treatment of socio-cultural and constructivist theories of learning. In part of this treatment, they propose that the individual is constructed, that in fact all learning must be situated in activity, context and culture, within a community of practice. They delineate an argument that begins something like this. A person is born with a kind of *world-openness* as a natural entity. Humans enter a series of worlds in which they continually make and remake themselves and the world and in this way they both shape their world and act as artefacts of their worlds. The notion of world-openness adds to my understanding of Lugones' (1987) world-traveling. I would suggest that my own experience of world-traveling in the outreach is not unique; both Ron and Charlotte seemed to position themselves in the outreach world in a way that confirms an ongoing world-openness and revision. Similarly, Bhabha (1994) suggests that the liminal space in which we engage in articulation of cultural differences creates "in-between spaces (that) provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (pp.1, 2). With these ideas in mind, I have come to believe that Charlotte, Ron, and I shared experiences in our communities that allowed us to learn more about teaching and ourselves as teachers, by encouraging us to

shape and be shaped through active contribution to the community and through a re-imagining of our personal teaching stories. Packer and Goicoechea (p. 231) suggest that "formation and transformation of the person can occur only in a social context that is constitutive of being" and this is reflected in Charlotte's position that she cannot *be* any other way in the outreach school, this is all she knows to do because it comes from the centre of who she is, rather than from what she knows as a high school Math and Science teacher. It is echoed in Ron's ferocious advocacy of his students, as he vicariously relives his own foundation story of being an at-risk youth, and in doing so, tells a new story for himself of returning service to society, perhaps a redemption story, through his commitment to at-risk youth. Palmer (1997) reminds us that "identity and integrity have as much to do with our shadows and our limits, our wounds and fears, as with our strengths and potentials" (p. 5).

Through a deliberate participation in our respective learning communities, each of us developed a sense of agency that was noteworthy within the context of our own experiences. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) further develop their proposition by suggesting that practical activity, in the form of labour and communication is one way in which we inhabit ourselves in the world and maintain our relation between things, people, and context. They point out that we do many things through labour and speech that not only represent the world but occupy it as well, in a way that may satisfy our desire for recognition. Throughout my time at Granville and Rosedale, it became clear to me that both Ron and Charlotte were engaged in the labour of teaching and mentoring as well as the shaping and advocacy of their learning communities in ways that went beyond

the typical teacher's commitment. The rewards that were most appreciated by them were the acknowledgement from students, or from other educators, of the *goodness* of their work. They appreciated the recognition which arises in sustained, integrated relationships with students and their families, and with other educators and human services people.

However, it created significant personal dissonance for them when their work was misunderstood or devalued by members in wider circles of the learning community. Packer and Goicoechea (2000) acknowledge this state of personal dissonance and suggest that a split in a person's sense of self can motivate the search for identity.

> Human being is always positing as well as posited-always pushing beyond the identity conferred by a community of practice. People actively strive to come to terms with the practices of their community, adopting an attitude, taking a stand on the way membership of a community has positioned them. As they do this their activity acts on that community, reproducing it or transforming it. (p. 234)

Similarly, Bhabha (1994) acknowledges desire and recognition in identity.

> As soon as I desire I am asking to be considered… In the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself (and) once more it is the desire for recognition (which provokes) a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self in the world of travel. (p. 8, 9)

Similar themes appears in the work of Palmer (1997) and Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1996) who state respectively "teaching is always done at the dangerous intersection of personal and public life" (p. 7) and "identity does not have a fixed location inside the

body . . . but (is) amid the human subject's perceived and interpreted relations in the world" (p. 5).

Ron and Charlotte's teaching identities often seemed to me less tenuous than my own, perhaps because they had been teaching in the outreach for a longer time, perhaps because they possess a broader set of life experiences than I and welcomed changed differently. By the time I left the outreach school and returned to the classroom, I was finally experiencing a wonderful sense of being at-ease, as Lugones puts it. The previous quotes put into words my sometimes overwhelming experience of struggling to be a teacher in a new place, one in which a story of myself had not yet been told. However, I think that this process is not linear but more a spiral process. There were instances for both Ron and Charlotte when they told a story of living uncertainly that came from a lack of recognition, from feeling invisible, or from being part of a program that was marginalized.

Through this chapter, I have noted some underlying themes in the conversations between Ron, Charlotte and I, and in this last section I have sketched the outline of some of Bhabha's ideas and Packer and Goicoechea's six central themes of nondualist ontology behind these themes to try to further my own understanding of these stories. The phrase learning community has different connotations for me then it did when I first started this work. Before I could see the *parts* of the idea, and how they all meshed, in an image of dynamic machinations, fundamentally inter-joined. By conducting my exploration within a deliberated awareness of context, I have changed my own perceptions. Now I see learning community as holistic; it is rarely fixed, is in itself an entity that conducts its

own action upon the lives of its inhabitants, and is conducted through their actions and desires. It is like the air, and we are of it; what is essential is invisible to the eye.

Ron and Charlotte seem to me to be remarkable educators. The very best teachers I've had throughout my life have shared a quality I can call grace, but that is only partly correct. What would be closer would be a word yet to be created that might describe an *inhabiting* of place, at a vibration akin to the wings of bees, but with a dignity and solidness that suggests stillness. The very best teachers I've known inhabit themselves and their place in their worlds completely, in a manner that acknowledges the fundamental seamlessness of people within place. I see this same quality in these two people I am honoured to call colleagues.

Remembrance: Leaving the Outreach, Returning to the Classroom

> Thomas Wolfe said that going home again is like stepping into a river. You cannot step into the same river twice: you cannot go home again. After a very long time away, you will not find the same home you left behind. It will be different and so will you. It is quite possible that home will not be home at all, meaningless except for its sentimental place in your heart. At best, it will point the long way back to where you started, its value lying in how it helped to shape you and in the part of home you carried away. (Harris, 1995, p. 104)

I am thinking about this opening paragraph in Harris' memoir as I am driving along the sun-soaked summer fields of central Alberta. Through the open window blows a smell that reminds me of elementary school, something hot, dry, and sweet, vaguely

reminiscent of my Grade 5 classroom. I have a sudden, irrelevant memory of my classmates and myself hunched down in the grass and clover as our teacher read aloud to us, braiding dandelions, each others' hair, warrened in like small animals in the fragrant green. This time of year, this and early September, often provokes memories associated with going to school. Today, I am going to my new school, to unpack my meagre boxes in a great yawning classroom that will one day next fall contain me and 30 high school students.

My last day at my own outreach school was just last week. I wept. As much as I feel anticipation at rejoining the classroom, I find myself wondering whether I really want to adapt to the unthinking participation in institutional culture that I recognize in myself from the past. I have asked my mentor, my outreach school principal, to be prepared to hold the mirror up for me, so to speak. I asked him to make a list of five phrases that would describe the parts of my teaching practice that I developed in my 3 years in our outreach school. I said I would come back at the end of my first year back in the classroom to see the list and hope that these things are still true. My lessons here have been too precious, too hard won for me to allow myself to let them go (personal practice journal, July 5, 2005).

I have now spent a year back in the classroom, and found, like the Wolfe quote that I placed in my journal a year ago, that I am not stepping into the same river; home no longer exists. As a result of my experiences as an outreach teacher and researcher I see a familiar world anew and notice those things that previously were unnoticeable. Interestingly, my new colleagues seem very aware that I have come from the local

outreach school. I hope this research text will occupy a "division of speech" place, and act as a kind of translation between the dominant discourse of public education and the burgeoning story of outreach education. Lugones' (1987, p. 18) statement stays with me, "Without knowing the others' 'world', one does not know the other, and without knowing the other, one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present."

Learning Community as a Microcosm

I have learned a great deal during my time teaching and researching in outreach schools, and as a result my thinking has also evolved. My hiking experiences in the Southwest American deserts provide a rudimentary analogy.

The desert can appear uninhabitable to the traveler, remote, and even desolate. Desert ecologists will assure you that this is not true; complex ecological systems support a network of hardy desert dwellers uniquely adapted to their environment. When informed of the range of flora and fauna, the traveler is likely to be astounded. The intrepid hiker, seeking the heart of the matter, may travel through canyon lands, dry washes, and saguaro forests and still leave feeling that she has not truly understood desert life. She will not have noticed the biological soil crust in her boot treads, and perhaps knocked it away absentmindedly. However, this biological soil crust is one of the foundations of the desert ecosystem, and while it is true that it is fragile, it forms part of a microcosm that is essential to the functioning of the rest of the desert. The outreach learning community is also a microcosm, and in some jurisdictions, is a place that serves

functions that benefit the whole system. An outreach school can be seen as a rich and thriving learning community, constituted through relationships among adaptable educators and students, but perhaps not especially well recognized or understood as a place of community within the monolithic institution of education.

Reaching In, Reaching Out: Community in the Outreach School

When I chose this title for the study, it was at the point in my own discovery of myself as an outreach teacher where I felt like I was being turned inside out. Yet, even now, at a different point in my own development, the name seems to fit. The learning curve of the last 4 years has required me to draw from intrapersonal resources I didn't know I had, thus the reaching in, but this same learning curve required that I extend myself to others in unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable ways, and so the reaching out. While I set out to understand how other educators experienced learning communities in alternate school settings, I became aware that some of my assumptions about community did not quite fit with the idiosyncrasies of the three outreach schools I attended to. I had not fully understood that any understanding of community must be based in acknowledgment of the importance of the particular and the individual.

I originally set out with the following questions in mind:

- How do teachers experience the outreach school as a learning community?
- What are teachers' experiences of pedagogical practice in an outreach school?
- How are experiences of community reflected in teachers' stories?

Shortly after entering into the field, I became aware of questions unanticipated which were surfacing and needed attending to. There was a generativity of meaning, an uncovering of further questions (Ellis, 1998; Jardine, 1998) within the context of the lives of Ron and Charlotte. These further questions can be stated as follows:

- How do teachers imagine themselves within the outreach community?
- How do teachers see themselves and others creating and re-creating a learning community in the outreach school?

For Ron, Charlotte, and me, the outreach learning community was poorly understood and sometimes poorly received within a teacher's typical community of practice—our own classroom colleagues and our school districts. Part of this was attributed to the pioneering nature of the work done in outreach schools. However, each of us had done considerable networking within a broader community of practice by reaching out to other agencies that support the welfare of youth. I know most of the family and social services staff within my immediate geographical area and have a far better grasp of how to access services for my students of which I previously had no knowledge. Ron and Charlotte also positioned themselves as community liaisons as seen in their comments and anecdotes. Perhaps as a result of this role there is a strong sense for these educators that the school is interdependent with the local geographical community. In a traditional school, often counselling or administrative staff assumes the role of liaison. I wonder how the borders of the traditional learning community might change if classroom educators were encouraged to investigate themselves as part of a larger system that serves the needs of youth.

One of the assumptions that I held, one that is reflected in much of the literature, is that learning communities are bounded places and that within these boundaries, each member has an assigned role to play. For example, students learn, teachers teach and learn alongside students, administrators lead, and parents support. That these assumptions are implicit in much of the rhetoric of learning community literature emphasizes the distance the school has come from being an embedded part and reflection of the village to being a gesellschaftlich instrument of the greater society. However, in listening to Ron and Charlotte and observing some small slices of their daily reality, it is clear that in their outreach schools, roles are not static, nor are they appropriated according to formal title. Instead, Ron and Charlotte found themselves inhabiting a multiplicity of roles, ever-shifting, that had few boundaries within or even outside the school walls. This permeability between their work identities and personal identities made for educators whose identities were noticeably integrated in a plurality that recalls Tonnies' gemeinschaft relations, relations built through living together and inhabiting a common place interdependently. This research suggests a need for professional development for all educators that promotes dialogue about the structures, purposes, and place for alternative schools within the public school paradigm. One of the results of this study is that I can no longer in good conscience define a role for teachers in my own mind without acknowledging the primacy of contextual implications, and that as the context shifts, individuals need to maintain awareness and shift as well.

With the role of the teacher open to revision, both Ron and Charlotte felt empowered to redefine their pedagogical relationships with students. Not only were they

able to call upon their interests, experiences, and skills from a life outside school in the service of mentoring, but they were able to reduce many of the systemic boundaries within traditional schools that bar students from accessing the help they need from the adults in their lives. Raywid (1993) points out through the practice of assigning youngsters to seven or eight classrooms a day, and by assigning each teacher 150 or more students a day, it is "virtually guaranteed that primary associations (can) not be cultivated and gemeinschaft (can) not develop" (p. 31). It would be a benefit to students in all types of schools to have relationships with adults re-imagined toward advising and mentoring rather than, as Barth (2005, p. 116) suggests, one in which educators send a chilling message to students, "Learn or we will punish you." It is my experience that the structure of the typical secondary school does not provide for this type of relationship often enough. Perhaps it might be helpful for traditional school teachers and other members of those school communities to reconsider the many ways that educators can facilitate growth in students in relationships that extend beyond the deliverance of effective classroom instruction. One of the implications of this study is that it reveals, through the voices of teachers, the needs for all teachers to shift their focus from the instrumental concerns of teaching to the individual and interpersonal. I call upon policy makers to provide the resources needed to enable this shift if we are to create schools that are truly strong learning communities.

Within my time at Rosedale and Granville, and in my own work at Storefront, it became clear that caring student/teacher relationships were fostered and cherished by both teachers and students and well regarded and actively supported by school

administrators and parents. There was no sense that cultivating a strong personal relationship with students was somehow an addition to the more important work of developing good lessons and using the latest teaching techniques. However, this ethos is not always prevalent in the typical secondary school. This situation might be ameliorated if pre-service teacher preparation programs build in components that would ask potential educators to reconsider what a teacher is and does, perhaps by highlighting some of the many alternative educational structures in which they may find themselves teaching or by providing for additional practicum experiences in non-traditional school settings. Ashcroft (1999) notes that there are very few programs that offer pre-service education in the area of working with at-risk students and asserts that it should be considered a discipline in its own right, much like special education.

Ron and Charlotte experienced teaching practice less as a set of skills and processes and more as a way of *being* a person in relationships, with the felt moral obligation to honour their fiduciary obligations to youth. Noticeably, in conversations with Ron and Charlotte, there was an absence of focus on the *curriculum as planned* (Aoki, 1993). In fact, sometimes the curriculum as planned was used as a secondary vehicle to support learning that was taking place in the context of life and growing up. These pedagogical processes could not likely have developed in quite the same way in the milieu of the traditional high school, but required a separate place in which to evolve.

As a place of community, the three outreach schools I came to know exhibited the best practices of public place planners and were consistent with the descriptions and atmosphere of other outreach schools (Beeson, 2001; Bouska, 2001; Housego, 1999;

Raywid, 1993; Van Slyke, 2001). These places, while very different from one another, all created a sense of welcome and extended outward into the community. They exhibited generosity (Relph, 1993), a distinctiveness of place (Seamon, 1979), and a pedagogic atmosphere that was non-coercive and non-restrictive (Beattie, 1999; Housego, 1999), allowing members the latitude necessary to experiment with roles.

Educators who had been confined within the classroom were able to augment their repertoire of teaching roles which could then be transferred to other school settings. Charlotte, from her current placement in the regular high school classroom, is still telling stories of individual kids who don't fit in with the milieu but who fit right in with her. Ron has taken his skills to an area where committed educators are much needed and has moved his practice to a group home where he is educating incarcerated youth. In Charlotte and Ron's experiences in their respective outreach schools, students who had previously been trouble-makers and unsuccessful learners became success stories. However, there is a distinct paucity of research that looks at the lived realities of outreach students, suggesting that there is a need for further research about the experiences of students in outreach schools.

Eyles (1989) reminds us that individuals create and creatively transform themselves, often in response to a place and that place is "vital for the establishment of personal identity" (p. 108). The places of these outreach learning communities as microcosmic environments are, in the words of Charlotte, "cocoon-like," nurturing and enabling transformation, in stark contrast to the traditional high school classroom whose desk rows and walls are indicative of an institution designed in a time of industrialization,

for students presumably bound for factory work. The three outreach school places of Rosedale, Granville, and Storefront are, in many ways, well-positioned to prepare students for participation as a member of the public sphere in the 21st century.

Conclusion

A few years ago I was given a copy of the book "A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned" by Jane Tompkins (1996). The book chronicles one woman's life through her remembrances of her public school days, her rigorous graduate work, and a subsequent university teaching career during the decades spanning the 1970s to the late 1990s. In her writing, she reveals to her reader, among other things, a coherent account of teaching across three decades, in a place and a time where few of her assumptions about the art of teaching supported her experiences. She found herself living a splintered existence, pursuing tenure and professional recognition while trying to satisfy her own questions about teaching and learning and the knowledge that is important. In many ways, Tompkins' story is one that has provided a reference point ever since I read it because of the tone of her retelling. It is all in the subtitle: What the Teacher Learned. The humbleness implied in this title, and in Tompkins' tone in her memoir, reminds me that humility is one of the most compelling qualities in a teacher. For this reason, I borrowed this idea when I was called upon to speak at this year's graduation ceremony at Storefront School. I offer this final remembrance of my time as a member of the outreach community as a tribute to outreach students and teachers everywhere

Remembrance: Address To The Graduating Class of 2006, Storefront School

Thank you for inviting me to share the very special ritual of your graduation today. I am honoured to be here. I am especially honoured because I have had the pleasure of working alongside each of you graduates in your endeavour to complete your studies. I am honoured because each of these young people exhibit personal qualities which reassure me that they will be able to assume their rightful place as heirs of our society. I am honoured because I am in the presence of staff, parents, family, and friends who have created a nurturing place and community in which these students were able to thrive.

I have come to you today from an odd place in my own life. I left Storefront this time last year to re-engage my teaching practice in the regular high school. At the same time, I have been writing a dissertation focusing on the outreach school as a place of community that is the culmination of several years of study and research. As I was preparing to compose this talk, I realized that some of the most important things I have learned about learning and teaching in these last few years were taught to me by my students. I would like to share with you what the teacher has learned.

I have learned that persistence in youth is a force worthy of awe. From watching students, I see that it is possible for one to gather the strength to put concerns with family, friends, finances, and health aside in order to stay committed. I have learned to look for creativity in unexpected places. The best education a student can get is one in which they plan and execute their own approach to the material, and seek their own understanding if those units of study are to be internalized to the point of usefulness. In this context it is a

fundamentally creative act to set about learning something and it is a creative act to solve the many problems that students encounter in their learning, not the least of which is the actual articulation of a problem.

I have learned that intellectual rigor can be lonely, but that the best pursuits of learning compel you to share your knowledge. It was my secret joy when students came perplexed by their understandings as they negotiated concepts. You were willing to wrestle with concepts which were strangers, and make them friends, and that is a remarkable testament to your future. I have also discovered that it takes a sense of playfulness to learn. Humour, wit, and a sense of play rise to the surface when everyone pitches in together to accomplish a task. This takes trust and a willingness to engage others. It is a powerful education that is built within close relationships.

I see now that the world is indeed the only classroom you will ever need. This is a tribute to staff members who have created opportunities for students to exercise their valuable practical knowledge, to community members and parents who supported this learning, and to you students, who took wing to demonstrate to us the glory of your flight. Finally, I have learned that we are *all* teachers and we are *all* learners, and we serve the lessons of Experience best when we humble ourselves before her. When I say I am honoured to be asked to address you graduates today, perhaps I should say more accurately that I am humbled by learning *alongside* each of you grads today. Thank you for the lessons. You are the world's future teachers in all that will you do, and today I feel a considerable confidence in the future (excerpt from personal writing portfolio, June 2006).

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Appendices

Appendix A

Information letter for participants

Reaching in, reaching out: Teachers' experiences in outreach schools

Dear: _____
(Participant's name)

I am an outreach teacher and doctoral student at the University of Alberta. I am conducting a research study with a purpose to understand how teachers experience teaching in an outreach school. The primary purpose of this study is to complete my doctoral dissertation requirements for degree, but this data may be used in further work I may publish or present at a later time. I would value your participation in this study.

The study will be conducted as a narrative inquiry, focusing on sharing stories of experience. Your involvement in the study would include an initial taped interview to find out a bit about your history as a teacher. Subsequently, I would like to visit your school weekly or bi-weekly to get to know the day-to-day happenings in your school over a period of three months (April– June 2004). During that time, I would anticipate that we would meet three to five more times for taped conversations that explore various aspects of your teaching practice and experiences. These taped conversations may take between 1 and 2 hours. During my research, I will also keep field notes that journal my own impressions and observations of the school community, and I would like to see any artifacts or documents that may help me understand your school community better, such as policy statements, or photo collections. To complete the data collection, I would invite you to contribute any writing or visual representations that you wish to help me represent your experiences of teaching in an outreach school. Since I am working with several participants, we may explore the possibility of meeting together in a focus group once or twice. This outline is a suggested starting point; the amount of time we spend together in these activities is flexible and negotiable to respect the busy-ness of teachers' lives.

A narrative inquiry explores experience by seeking narrative themes, and sometimes by representing events through anecdotes or storytelling. Throughout the course of the data collection, I will ask you to review transcripts and my field notes so that you may give me feedback. As well, you will be asked to read and respond to the research text at several points during its drafting, subsequent to the initial three-month data collection period, to ensure that I am representing your experiences congruent with your expectations. You may request removal of any aspect of the data collected that you feel uncomfortable sharing publicly. The final research document will be shared with you prior to being made available to the public. The final document will represent a negotiated text that carefully represents and respects the experiences of the participants.

All data collected during the study will be kept secure and not shared with anyone not directly involved with the research. Other persons involved, such as a transcriber or editor, will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement prior to seeing any data, and will comply with the *Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants.*

Your anonymity will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms for people and locations, and timelines of events will be blurred so that you will not be identifiable in any documents, primary or secondary, resulting from the research. This data may be used for further articles, print or electronic, presentations, teaching or publishing purposes. In these cases, the *Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants* will be observed at all times to protect the interests and privacy of participants. Participation is free and voluntary and you may decline participation, or withdraw from the study at any time without any sort of penalty. In the case of withdrawal, data collected prior to your withdrawal will not be used, and will be destroyed.

If you require more information please contact me directly at gaylene1@telus.net or (780) 980-1362. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. George Richardson at 492-4980 and george.richardson@ualberta.ca or the graduate coordinator, Dr. George Buck at 492-3572 and george.buck@ualberta.ca. This research will comply with the University of Alberta *Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants* (http://www.ualberta.ca/~unisecr/policy/sec66.html). This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at (780) 492-3751.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation, and while research benefits cannot be guaranteed, I hope you will find participation provides you the opportunity to dialogue and reflect on your practice in a new way. The research findings will increase educational stakeholders' understanding of the unique experiences you encounter in your daily teaching practice, and add to the body of research in this area. I hope that you will agree to participate and look forward to working with you. Thank you so much for taking the time to consider my invitation to participate.

If you agree to participate, please complete the consent form attached in duplicate, send one to me and keep one copy for yourself.

Sincerely,

Gaylene Schreiber

Consent to participate in research study

I, _____, have read the information letter provided and had opportunity to access clarification or more information. I am willing to participate in the research study titled " Reaching in, reaching out: Teachers' experiences in outreach schools", conducted by Gaylene Schreiber under the auspices of the University of Alberta. I give permission for this data to be used for thesis requirements and for future publishing and teaching purposes.

I further recognize that there is no payment of any kind associated with this research, and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. I consider the consent I am giving as informed consent.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Request letter to school superintendents

Mrs. G. Schreiber
13 Craigen Court
Leduc, Alberta
April 26, 2004

Dear :

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in your district. I am conducting this study as a doctoral candidate in the Doctorate of Educational Leadership program in Secondary Education at the University of Alberta. As well, I am an educator in an established outreach school in Blackgold Regional Schools

Please find attached a short summary of the research I have proposed. I would be available to meet with you if you would like more information as to the value and scope of this study. I believe this study will help the educational community to more fully understand the outreach school, and educators' experiences of their role in this learning community. An educator in the school has already expressed interest in the proposed study during informal conversations. I will seek further written permission from the principal and those who volunteer to participate as part of the permission process of the Ethics Review Committee at the University of Alberta. I hope you will grant permission for this research to take place.

If you choose to grant permission for the research, I will need to obtain a letter of permission from you. Please contact me if you need more information with which to make your decision. I look forward to hearing your response.

Sincerely,

Gaylene Schreiber
gaylene1@telus.net
980-1362
wk 986-9466 (Storefront School, Leduc)

Appendix C

Backgrounder for superintendents

Introduction:

Writings on school effectiveness propose that a sense of belonging to a learning community enhances both student learning and professional learning. Recent research suggests that learning communities develop more effectively in small schools and alternative schools than in large traditional schools. Since 1996 there has been a marked increase in the number of outreach schools in Alberta. I am interested in exploring the outreach school by looking at it through the lens of literature on learning communities, and cultural geography: specifically how teachers experience the outreach school as a learning community.

Research question:

How do teachers experience the outreach school as a learning community?

Sub-questions:

What are teacher's experiences of pedagogical practice in the outreach school?
How are experiences of community reflected in teacher's stories?

Methodology:

I intend to collect data that will allow a rich understanding of the participants' experiences of community and place. I will be on site alongside my participants, observing and participating in the school community. I am approaching this research using the methodological orientation of narrative inquiry. This research is qualitative, and seeks to describe and represent, but not measure or evaluate any aspect of the school, participants or the programs.

Participants:

Participants will be teachers who volunteer freely to take part in the study. I will endeavour to cause as little disruption to the research site as possible, and will strive to offer what ever services or assistance I can during my time on site in order to help alleviate any concerns about the time it takes to participate. As I am a certificated teacher with experience working in an outreach community, I expect I will be of significant assistance and little burden. The interviewing will be done on personal time.

No students will be directly involved in this research. However, students may benefit from the additional professional services I provide to my teacher participants.

Timeline:

I hope to integrate myself into the site in April, 2004. I will collect data from April through June, and then begin a gradual disengagement of the site through September and October, incrementally visiting less often. I will continue to be in contact with the teacher participants as I compose the final text documents, and as they approve or edit these texts. I intend to complete the final text and do my oral defense in the winter of 2005.

Risks and benefits of research:

I do not foresee any risks to participants. I will follow the *University of Alberta Ethical Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants*. I will protect the anonymity and the interests of my participants through my interactions with them, and I have allocated time and teacher resource in order to alleviate the time burden which may be placed on them. In addition, members will be aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time with impunity. Data collected will not be shared with anyone not directly involved with the study. Should an external transcriber be employed, he or she will be provided with a copy of the *Guidelines* and sign a confidentiality agreement. All measures to maintain anonymity will be observed.

Participants will benefit through the opportunity to explore and represent their experiences as outreach educators, and engage in professional reflection.
The research may assist outreach educators in planning their professional development, and will provide dialogue with other outreach educators. The educational community at large will benefit through the availability of research that represents an educational setting that is increasingly prevalent in Alberta, but sparsely represented in the research.

Background of the researcher:

I have been a public school educator for 13 years, 11 of those with Blackgold Regional Schools. I completed my Masters of Educational Leadership in Education Policy Studies at the University of Alberta in 2000. My research area was educational law. I was accepted for doctoral study in July 2001, and have since completed all required coursework, including courses in qualitative research methods and narrative inquiry. I am also currently serving with the Alberta Teacher's Association as a professional development instructor. I have previously done contract work with the Edmonton Regional Consortium on the Teaching and Learning with Technology project, and participated in many aspects of the English Language Arts achievement test and diploma exam process. I began my placement at Storefront School in September of 2002 after 11 years in the regular classroom.

Appendix D

Confidentiality agreement

Project title:

I, _____, the
_____(specific job description, e.g., interpreter/translator)
have been hired to _____.

I agree to:

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.

2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.

3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.

4. after consulting with the *Researcher(s)*, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).

5. other (specify).

_____ _____ _____

(print name) (signature) (date)

Appendix E

First conversation guide questions

1. Tell me about your current teaching assignment and about the structure of your student programs.

2. At what point in your career did you become an outreach teacher? How did that come about?

3. Can you talk a bit about your decision to become a teacher in the first place?

4. What kinds of expectations did you have of the role of teacher role during your pre-service training?

5. Do you remember much about how you pictured yourself as an educator?

6. Can you recall what expectations you had of your outreach school, or outreach schools before you started teaching in one? What did you think they were like?

7. Describe what you experienced the first few weeks that you were teaching in the outreach school. What were your first impressions?

8. At this point in your career, how would you characterize/describe your experiences of being a teacher as a whole?

9. How would you describe your experiences of being an outreach teacher?

Appendix F:

Second conversation guide questions

Focus: Debriefing of time-mapping and roles

Time:

1. When you did the time mapping activity were there any surprises for you?

2. How did you come up with the different categories of activity?
   Why did you choose the categories that you did?
   What categories of time do you find most rewarding?
   Help you be a more effective teacher?

3. Can you talk about the way you value the different activities?

4. How does this time of year compare to the rest of the year? Is there an ebb and flow in outreach teaching (similar to the traditional classroom)?

5. Are there other times outside of school that you are spending on school related tasks? In professional activities? What kinds of activities and when?

6. Can you describe your time patterns in summer school? How do they compare to the regular year?

7. If you could change the way that you spend your time what would you change?

Roles:

1. How would you describe the various roles that you fill around the school? Has this changed in the three years you have been here? How did this evolve?

2. How do you see yourself acting in the role of a life-coach or mentor for your students? Can you think of a specific student story about this?

3. What kind of role or identity do you see yourself and other outreach teachers assuming a) in the school district? b) in the community?

4. If you could change the way you inhabit your various roles as an educator what would you do/how would you achieve this?